

# **WOMEN'S POLICY JOURNAL**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPRING 2019

6 EDITORIAL WELCOME

7 WICKED WOMEN

Marie Perrot

## USE AND ABUSE OF WOMEN

10 TRY ME

Marie Perrot

11 WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK REVISITED

Capturing the Hidden Value of Domestic Labor

Daniela Philipson Garcia

19 NOTES, 05.07.2016

How To Not Make A Sandwich

Diksha Biljani

20 WHEN PARITY IS NOT ENOUGH

Sexual Violence in India's Armed Conflict

Poornima Rajeshwar

23 WHEN A MAN LOVES YOUR BODY MORE THAN THE  
SOMEBODY OF YOU

Diksha Biljani

26 ART AS POWER

27 Cosplay Empowerment

Annalisa

28 Liberdade

Regina P.

## **REPRESENTATION AND POWER**

30 FORMATION

Marie Perrot

31 WHY DON'T MORE WOMEN RUN CITIES?

Hannah Walker

34 BUILDING AMERICA'S BACKBENCH

Rebecca Kriegman

38 THE FUTURE IS NOW

Adam Giorgi

39 EL COMEDOR

Female Migrants in Charge

Thanh Mai Bercher

43 THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF GENDER-LENS INVESTING

Friederike Strub

## **NEW LENSES ON FEMINISM**

56 MISOGYNY AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Nikila Kaushik

60 RADICAL FEMINISM IN "UNLIKELY" PLACES

The Work of Tarabai Shinde

Ira Guha

64 #PEPPERDEMMINISTRIES

A Digital Afrocentric Approach to Feminism

Amazing Grace Danso and Jackson Miller

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# EDITORIAL WELCOME

**WE STARTED WORKING** on this 12th volume of the *Women's Policy Journal* in Fall 2018, the tail end of what many have dubbed the “Year of the Women.” There is a lot to celebrate. In the United States, a record 102 women were sworn into the House of Representatives, including the first Native American and Muslim women. Women in Saudi Arabia can now legally drive, and Irish voters defended a woman's right to choose. The #MeToo movement has exploded in full force, bringing powerful perpetrators to account worldwide.

Yet in far too many situations, women still face an uphill battle to secure their basic dignity and security, let alone equal pay or access to quality education. To reflect the urgency and seriousness of this work, we begin our journal with pieces speaking boldly on the use and abuse of women and our bodies. These authors speak truth to power, prescribing thoughtful solutions.

As we acknowledge these challenges and the long road ahead, we are inspired by the power and relentless drive of women around the world. We thus follow with a section on the representation and power of women, highlighting the nuances and complexities around women in leadership across sectors. These women are our beacons, lighting the way to a more hopeful and equitable future.

In the continual fight to address the serious issues that prevent gender equity from being fully realized, it is also critical to listen to the voices that are often overlooked. We strongly believe in an intersectional approach to this work, and strive to highlight the innovative approaches to feminism found around the world. Last September, 15-year-old Greta Thunberg went on strike from school for two weeks before the Swedish elections to call attention to the climate crisis. These unlikely examples serve as powerful proof-points of what acting with urgency means. Thus, our journal concludes with a section on “new” lenses on feminism.

Continuing this journal in its second year of revival would not have been possible without the concerted efforts of the editorial staff. Our editors came together to support each other and their authors with a deep spirit of humility, thoughtfulness, and collaboration. We have been so impressed by their critical eyes and grateful for their dedication. Professor Richard Parker has continued to lend his advice and time as needed. Martha Foley, our publisher, continues to be the glue that holds everything together, for not only our journal but our companion journals across the school.

We hope this edition continues to serve as inspiration to those fighting for gender equity and increasingly inclusive policies across the world.

Sincerely,

Anisha Vachani & Martha Lee

Editors-In-Chief, *Women's Policy Journal*



## WICKED WOMEN

Marie Perrot

Marie Perrot is a Research Associate at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. Prior to joining the Ounce, Marie was co-chair for the 2018 inaugural Women in Power Conference at the Harvard Kennedy School. You can follow her art work, which focuses on feminist illustrations and children's book illustrations, on instagram @marinellapaints.



**USE  
AND  
ABUSE  
OF  
WOMEN**

try me



**TRY ME**

Marie Perrot

# WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK REVISITED

## CAPTURING THE HIDDEN VALUE OF DOMESTIC LABOR

Daniela Philipson García

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**IN HIS 2014** State of the Union address, then-President Barack Obama declared: “Today, women make up about half our workforce. But they still make 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. That is wrong, and in 2014, it’s an embarrassment.”<sup>1</sup> Although the 77 cents statistic varies significantly according to race and age—in the US, white women make 82 cents, black women make 65 cents, Latina women make 58 cents,<sup>2</sup> and the wage gap widens and narrows as women approach and surpass their thirties<sup>3</sup>—it is widely used and frequently written on protest signs during women’s marches.

By focusing only on a single statistic, neon-pink-pussy-hat-wearing protestors are doing a disservice to the historical feminist debate on wages and to the debate on wages for housework. These debates offer a rich discussion on how best to recognize the value and worth of domestic work, the social and economic conditions that make it invisible and unpaid, and the unequal division of labor that defines it as “women’s work.” We must then ask: Are wages the be-all and end-all of liberating women? What about other non-financial means of

compensation, such as childcare, healthcare, and social security? Why are men’s wages the benchmark?

Housework is a gender issue because it is still mostly done by women. In 2016, women in Britain did almost 60 percent more unpaid housework than men.<sup>4</sup> A study of the United States in the same year revealed that even same-sex couples are biased, perceiving childcare, groceries, laundry, and cleaning as predominantly feminine tasks.<sup>5</sup> Another study suggests that if the value of nonmarket household production were incorporated into the measurement of GDP in the US, nominal GDP in 1965 would have been 39 percent higher, and 26 percent higher in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Other countries have conducted similar calculations that underscore the hidden value of unpaid domestic work. In Mexico, unpaid housework is worth approximately 20 percent of GDP,<sup>7</sup> more than twice the added value of petrol rents—a source of wealth and pride that has long been considered the backbone of Mexico’s economy.<sup>8</sup>

Should housework be commoditized and therefore waged? This question has been the

subject of intense scholarly debate since the first international campaign on this issue, “Wages for Housework,” was launched in Padua, Italy in 1972. Shortly afterwards, the New York Committee that formed part of the same movement stated that, as Marxist feminists, they sought to “end the exploitation of women in the home.”<sup>9</sup> Activists within the movement asserted that acknowledging housework as work was not only a demand for wages, but the germ of a political revolution that would redefine women’s power in society—a movement that has lately been revived in industrialized countries in the aftermath of #MeToo.

For feminists both at the time and since, “Wages for Housework” has been a divisive issue. On the one hand, some have regarded housework as tedious and repetitive work that perpetuates economic dependency on breadwinners, typically men. On the other, critics of this view have opposed the idealization of waged work and underscored the intrinsic value of housework without the need to commoditize or put a price tag on it.

## WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

In her book, *Revolution at Point Zero*, the activist and figurehead of the “Wages for Housework” movement, Silvia Federici, builds her argument in favor of wages for domestic work from the initial premise that wages are a crucial component of the social contract in our modern capitalist system. Work (and the wages that define it as such) does not come naturally as something humans want to do, she argues. Rather, it is “the only condition under which you are allowed to live.”<sup>10</sup> The “Wages for Housework” campaign built upon many of the Marxist ideas set out by Friedrich Engels in his book, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, which drew an explicit parallel between the economic dependency of both women and the proletariat on those who have accumulated wealth:

“In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat.”<sup>11</sup>

Marxist feminists argue that housework has become normalized as unwaged work because the division of labor between the public (waged) sphere and private (unwaged) sphere has made it invisible to society. Federici adds that housework’s association with essentialist notions of womanhood—such as domesticity and a propensity for unconditional care and love—have further relegated it to the low-status arena of “women’s work.”<sup>12</sup> She argues, furthermore, that wages are the means to demystifying femininity.

The main condition for housework to be recognized as work, according to Federici, is compensation through wages. This idea comes from the ideological position taken by Engels and Karl Marx, who argued in favor of the socialization and collectivization of household tasks by sharing responsibility for them with the larger community.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Marx and Engels, Federici stopped short of advocating for the centralized state planning of housework. However, she did draw closely on their thinking in arguing that assigning wages to housework brings women within the realm of public life, affording them equal class status without the need to socialize these tasks. As Federici explains, there is a fine line between these perspectives, which turns on the role of the state:

It is one thing to organize communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organize our meals. In one case we regain control over our lives, in the other we extend the State’s control over us.<sup>14</sup>

Federici has been criticized for the seeming contradiction inherent in subverting capital’s plan for women while fighting for wages—which enable the existence and continuation of capitalism in the first place. Federici’s

riposte was that the struggle for wages is not about entering capitalist relations because we have never been out of them.<sup>15</sup> To the contrary, it recognizes how indispensable housework is for capitalism. Nonetheless, Federici does fail to propose a solution that avoids perpetuating an unequal division of housework between the sexes.

## INDUSTRIALIZATION OF HOUSEWORK

Less than a decade later, the academic, activist, and former member of the US Communist Party Angela Davis fundamentally shifted the discussion around “Wages for Housework” by critiquing the movement’s assumptions about the value of housework and considering its implications for working-class women and women of color. Davis’s argument rested on her view that the countless chores of housework—cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, making beds, sweeping, and shopping—are neither creative nor productive by nature. These burdens should be lifted from women *and* men, she argued, by incorporating them into the industrial economy.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, simply providing women with a paycheck for the housework they are already doing—as advocated by the “Wages for Housework” movement—maintains the existing division of labor and creates perverse incentives for women to remain trapped in a life of degrading and crushing work.<sup>17</sup>

For Davis, industrializing housework through engineering and technologically advanced machinery was an optimal solution that shifted domestic tasks back into the light of the public sphere and erased its associations with the private sphere—the same associations that render it invisible.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Federici, Davis—who abided by a more literal interpretation of Marxism than Federici—trusted state intervention to redefine housework and considered some domestic tasks worth socializing, such as childcare and meal preparation:

[ . . . ] the notion that the burden of

housework and child care can be shifted from their shoulders to the society contains one of the radical secrets of women’s liberation. Child care should be socialized, meal preparation should be socialized, housework should be industrialized—and these services should be readily accessible to working-class people.<sup>19</sup>

Davis draws from examples of women’s experience in non-capitalist economies to argue that sexual inequality is born alongside the creation of private property. In agrarian and pre-industrial societies, domestic chores were part of the daily means of production for securing the resources necessary for survival—food, clothing, and shelter. With the birth of industrialization, such means of production are taken into factories and domestic chores are transformed into dull and unproductive work. Because women simultaneously became responsible for all matters within the private sphere, the work they did assumed a lower status and domestic work became not a special kind of work, but a certain grade of work.<sup>20</sup>

The “Wages for Housework” campaign assumed a largely one-dimensional “housewife” experience, which in the early 1970s mostly resonated with middle- and upper-class white women. As a movement, it thus largely ignored the experiences of working-class women and women of color, who frequently bore the dual burden of working for a minimum wage outside the household, while simultaneously doing unpaid work at home. As Davis writes:

Like their men, Black women have worked until they could work no more. Like their men, they have assumed the responsibility of family providers. The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance of Black women are reflections of their labor and their struggles outside the home.<sup>21</sup>

In this light, Davis emphasizes that paying housewives would allow upper-class white women to be glorified as “workers,” without acknowledging that wages tend to be insufficient for women who bear the double burden.<sup>22</sup>

For Davis, women’s liberation rests not on wages but on lifting the burdens of domestic chores from society as a whole. Without better pay and working conditions under capitalism, wages are not sufficient to liberate women from economic dependency or their subordinate position in society because they allow for the continuation of the status quo, which saddles women with the vast majority of domestic labor and condemns working-class women and women of color to the doubly heavy burden of working both inside and outside the home.

## ADULT RESPONSIBILITY

The scholar and intersectional feminist activist, bell hooks, made a significant contribution to this debate in the early 1980s by re-assessing whether housework should be waged at all and formulated a particularly novel argument on the matter: “housework ought not be seen as demeaning or tedious, rather, it should be recognized as intrinsically valuable work that addresses the human needs for material order and paves the path toward adult responsibility.”<sup>23</sup> This argument is not dissimilar to that of Japanese home organizer and Netflix sensation Marie Kondo, who coaxes us to care for our material possessions and spaces that “spark joy.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, hooks disagrees with Davis in arguing that women should deem their work as valuable, regardless of whether men recognize it as such. The value of housework thus lies in the fulfillment of human needs and not in its price tag or level of productivity.<sup>25</sup>

According to hooks, housework should not be perceived as a commodity for sale in the market economy. By trying to frame it as such, she argues, feminists fall into a capitalist

trap of not valuing housework unless it has a money sign next to it:

Women, like other exploited and oppressed groups in this society, often have negative attitudes towards work in general and the work they do in particular. They tend to devalue the work they do because they have been taught to judge its significance solely in terms of the exchange value.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, hooks suggests that domestic chores provide important lessons for children in developing adult responsibility. Learning housework, she writes, teaches children to appreciate and respect their surroundings while ordering their material reality.<sup>27</sup> Boys need to be taught housework as a means to develop a healthy sense of autonomy (rather than relying on other women) and girls need to be taught that housework is not demeaning, but rather valuable in itself, so they are not deprived of personal satisfaction when carrying out these tasks.<sup>28</sup> The implications of hooks’ argument point toward a new generation of boys and girls who value cleanliness and order and for whom housework will be more equally distributed.

Lastly, in contrast to Davis, hooks breaks away from the traditional capitalist concept of value—that which is attached to productivity and monetary worth—and proposes a radical new way to think about housework: one which does not require acknowledgment from the economically powerful. By rejecting the classification of domestic chores as a commodity, the value of housework is allowed to rest on its intrinsic universal dignity as a basic human need.

Like Davis, hooks believes that the wider movement in favor of wages for housework alienates poor women of color and fails to take into account a broader, more inclusive definition of work.<sup>29</sup> This implies that greater recognition of women’s different experiences is needed and gives non-working-class

women the opportunity to become active allies by advocating for a set of policies that address gender-related problems that go beyond their own.<sup>30</sup>

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The “Wages for Housework” campaign demanded that women’s work in the household be acknowledged by extending the social contract beyond the public and into the private. To do so, Federici and other supporters of this campaign demanded that housework be waged and argued that the struggle for wages was the only vehicle to redefine women’s role in society. As later scholars have argued, however, waging housework is not enough for it to stop being considered women’s work. “Female liberation” requires more than wages; it requires social benefits and better working conditions. Putting too much emphasis on wages is counterproductive, because it fails to enhance autonomy and agency for women.<sup>31</sup>

Wages also reaffirm a traditional definition of work and reproduce the relationship between patron and laborer. Re-thinking the relationship between domestic work, wages, and economic dependence is crucial to interrupt the gendered division of labor between the private and the public. Kathi Weeks, a feminist and Marxist academic, writes:

Waged work remains today the centerpiece of late capitalist economic systems; it is, of course, the way most people acquire access to the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. It is not only the primary mechanism by which income is distributed, it is also the basic means by which status is allocated, and by which most people gain access to social services and benefits.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, alternatives that do not rely too heavily on wages, but offer a social security net including better services and the flexibility to allocate time more freely, ought to be

## **RE-THINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMESTIC WORK, WAGES, AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE IS CRUCIAL TO INTERRUPT THE GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC.**

considered. While wages for housework may reduce dependency, it does not help gender roles to be rethought; for this to happen, we need policies that offer social services and benefits regardless of labor condition. Two such policies are universal care and Universal Basic Income.

For capitalism even to exist, it is necessary for humans to reproduce and become consumers. However, the low levels of social benefits frequently sustained by capitalism—even in industrialized countries—make it increasingly difficult to have children and consequently care for them. This is a contradiction in the current stage of capitalism because it hinders reproduction and subsequently, consumption. Nancy Fraser, a critical theorist and philosopher, has called the seeming contradiction between capitalism and care a “care crisis.”

In its failure to provide a sufficiently comprehensive care system, the current stage of capitalism fails to provide a framework that allows for sustainable reproduction. Instead, it free-rides on the unpaid work of large, predominantly female sections of the population to provide care and maintain the bonds that allow families to exist and consume goods.<sup>33</sup> This argument is carefully crafted by Nancy Fraser, who demonstrates that relegating reproductive labor and care to the domestic sphere, “where its social importance is obscured,” jeopardizes the necessary social conditions for a profitable market economy.<sup>34</sup> In this context, universal care systems can fill

this gap by facilitating the most basic condition for human existence and consumption—reproductive labor.

Childcare in the United States is expensive. In states where professional childcare is available, annual costs can be as high as \$20,000. Some states do not even have access to these services, and are effectively “child-care deserts.”<sup>35</sup> In 2016 alone, approximately two million parents had to quit or turn down a job because of a lack of childcare in the United States.<sup>36</sup> A universal care system for children and the elderly provides one potential solution to the current care crisis. Compared to wages for housework, it offers a solution that is both more comprehensive and more flexible for parents because it gives them the choice to socialize care rather than do it themselves.

## AN UNCONDITIONAL INCOME WOULD—AT LEAST IN THEORY—BREAK THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND INCOME, ERODING THE SEXUALIZED DIVISION OF LABOR.

A universal childcare system (but not an elderly care program) is already in place in a number of countries around the world, such as France.<sup>37</sup> The French government provides families with care according to their income brackets. Care centers begin accepting children from the age of three months, who are then secured a spot in preschool until they reach the age of six. There is a clear case for replicating a system like this one around the world, accompanied by a system of care for the elderly, as part of a universal system of care that fills the “care gap.”<sup>38</sup>

Yet even a comprehensive universal care system has gaps: it provides a service for families, but not individuals. A more truly

comprehensive alternative could, therefore, be Universal Basic Income (UBI), which is paid unconditionally to individuals regardless of their household relationships, other incomes, or employment status.<sup>39</sup> Variations of UBI are currently being implemented at the local level in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and was tested at the country level in Finland during 2017-2018. Advocates of UBI stress that its three main components—universality, individuality, and unconditionality—can radically alter the unequal distribution of power in order to advance gender equality, although evidence to prove this has yet to be published.

More so than a universal care system, UBI implies a major overhaul not only of care, but of the composition of the private sphere itself. By providing individual transfers, and not household transfers, men and women would be free to divide their time between work and leisure as they like, regardless of their standing within a traditional nuclear family setting. An unconditional income would also—at least in theory—break the relationship between work and income, eroding the sexualized division of labor. Wages would no longer be the main divide between work performed inside and outside the home.

To achieve these ambitious ends, however, UBI would have to provide an income at least large enough to cover basic needs without a supplementary wage. Otherwise, it runs the risk of subsidizing precarious employment, and fails to eliminate the vicious economic dependency cycles that affect both housewives and women working double shifts inside and outside the home.

Ultimately, this points to a fundamental decision that governments and constituents must make: Are we willing to accept a significant increase in taxation and public spending to fund a Universal Basic Income or system of universal care in exchange for gender equality to be accessible for everyone? While alternatives like wages for housework can play a role

in helping some women to become members of the social contract, these fall short when it comes to reshaping the gendered dimensions of housework and its implications for the role of women in society. Waging housework, as well as closing the gender wage gap, are in essence “good.” However, they are band-aid solutions for more extensive problems spawned by capitalism. For a truly feminist and ethical treatment of all humans, a genuinely comprehensive solution will need to address the contradictions of the current care crisis and fundamentally rethink the nature of work in the private and public spheres.

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# NOTES, 05.07.2016

## HOW TO NOT MAKE A SANDWICH

Diksha Biljani

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**THE WOMEN IN** my family have always been housewives, have always waged wars against dust and partly charred vegetables. In 6th grade, the teacher said, “No honey, we write it as ‘home-maker;” and I immediately wondered if it was a secret gone a little too far. You see, my mother, she said her kids should have an education because she didn’t. I’ve seen households built upon a race against oneself, to make your kids beat your own standards of success, develop into butterflies when you could only be a moth. But endless A-pluses have never convinced the women of my family that women can be poor at beating spider webs and coffee-stained tank tops, have always been only partial acceptance of their defeat, that their daughters and granddaughters could spell but they’re still a long way from making a perfectly seasoned stew.

Two years ago my mother said to me, “But my dear, it’s for your own good, it’s so you can handle your own in the big lonely city you’re moving out into,” and all I could think was as if she never considered how much these skills would mean to my grandmother, as if she ever said the same to my brother, as if she ever smiled the same at me failing at it like she did at his, as if she would not sleep two times as well with the satisfaction of seeing her daughter all graduation equipped A-plus housework. Sorry, I mean “homework.”

But these unscarred detergent-soap-rinse-proof hands of mine have never picked up a whip because I was told to, have always practiced their culinary arts with pens and ink instead. Two years into college they taught us Simone de Beauvoir’s essay on the married woman. She said: “Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean over and over. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present.” And god damnit Mom, I said, I’m gonna not listen to you today because you don’t know yourself how wrong you are. But one day this nose-in-book, poor cook kid of yours will show you the sunlit side of feminism and genderless roles. She will build you a home of revolution and unorthodox childhoods. She will lift you from the corners of these dust-stained rooms and beds with creased bedsheets and that one day, you’re going to tell her: So what, I’m just glad you couldn’t make a sandwich.

# WHEN PARITY IS NOT ENOUGH

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA'S ARMED CONFLICT

Poornima Rajeshwar

*Poornima is a first-year Master's in Public Policy student at the Kennedy School, with a focus on political violence.*

**IN OCTOBER 2018**, the Supreme Court of India turned down a plea by the Central and Chhattisgarh governments to adjourn a case challenging the retention of members of a banned tribal<sup>1</sup> militia in official state forces.<sup>2</sup> The governments justified their appeal on the grounds that the matter was “sensitive” and could affect the results of the upcoming elections in the state of Chhattisgarh. This move to adjourn the case is symbolic of the government’s casual treatment of serious allegations of human rights violations in state-backed, anti-Maoist operations.

The Maoist insurgency, which first started as a revolt against landlords in 1967, is still ongoing in parts of Central India. In 2005 in Chhattisgarh, a local tribal militia called “Salwa Judum,” rumored to be state-funded, sprang up in retaliation to the guerrilla tactics of the Maoists in the region. However, in *Nandini Sundar & Others vs. State of Chhattisgarh (2011)*, the Supreme Court delegitimized Salwa Judum on grounds of excessive human rights abuses perpetrated by the militia.<sup>3</sup> The Court condemned the recruiting and arming of tribal youths without proper training and directed the government to investigate the

crimes. Salwa Judum was associated with allegations of sexual violence, burning of villages, torture, and large-scale displacement of civilians. However, despite the Supreme Court decision, it has been alleged that members of Salwa Judum have been retained in other forces such as the District Reserve Guard and Armed Auxiliary Forces.<sup>4</sup> Over the years, activists and scholars have criticized the Central and Chhattisgarh governments for ignoring the Supreme Court order to conduct serious investigation into these cases of human rights abuses perpetrated by security forces.

Since 2005, there have been several fact-finding reports and press statements by civil society<sup>5</sup> and women’s rights<sup>6</sup> organizations urging the state to investigate and redress allegations of sexual violence by armed forces. In January 2017 the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) released a strongly worded statement, acknowledging the rape of 16 tribal women by security forces of Chhattisgarh, stating “that it is of the view that, prima-facie, human rights of the victims have been grossly violated by the security personnel of the Government of Chhattisgarh for which the State Government is vicariously

## RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE OFTEN TREATED AS THE SPOILS OF WAR.

liable.<sup>7</sup> Despite these mounting allegations, the government has made minimal effort to investigate the violations and continues to deploy new forces in the Maoist regions.

The most recent move in tackling left-wing extremism in the worst-affected regions of Bastar, the epicenter of the movement in Chhattisgarh, has been the formation of a new battalion in the Central Reserve Police Force, Bastariya Warriors.<sup>8</sup> The battalion has recruited 534 tribals exclusively from four districts in Bastar to provide security to civilians and restrict the movement of the Maoists. For many, this newly formed battalion brings back memories of Salwa Judum, even though the government insists otherwise. In an article published in *The Quint*, Ajai Sahni, executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management, argues that “CRPF’s Bastariya Battalion has no conceivable connection with history.”<sup>9</sup> He calls it a regular battalion that is trained and that will follow the rules and disciplinary norms of the military. Additionally, he notes that the fact that “women [represent] a third of the battalion’s strength . . . [will] have a restraining, perhaps even civilizing influence on its actions.”<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly, in the same article he also says that the retention of the Salwa Judum cadres in the District Reserve Guard, while in strict violation of the Supreme Court order, has proved beneficial in certain operations, as the members’ local knowledge is helpful in navigating difficult terrain.

Rape and sexual violence are often treated as the spoils of war; however, Elizabeth Jean Wood, in her article “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence,” provides evidence that rape is not inevitable in war.<sup>11</sup> She argues that group leaders play a crucial role in determining the “repertoire of violence” and that combatants are likely to follow orders and norms. Wood finds that in the case of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a leftist guerrilla group in Sri Lanka, sexual violence perpetrated by combatants was rare due to strong condemnation

of such acts within the group.<sup>12</sup> Inaction on the part of the Indian government in punishing acts of violence that are contrary to the purpose of security in a conflict zone therefore perpetuates an air of impunity. Without repercussions for violations, the 44 weeks of training the battalion has undergone will be rendered meaningless.

The belief that simply adding women to peacekeeping missions will prevent violent excesses is also misguided. In “Does the Presence of Women Really Matter?” Olivera Simic argues that UN peacekeeping missions over the years have not necessarily been more successful in curtailing sexual violence just by deploying more women in the missions.<sup>13</sup> She cites research that suggests “women tend to fit into the military hypermasculine environment rather than change it.”<sup>14</sup> Sexual violence in areas of conflict, particularly peacekeeping missions, cannot be addressed by merely an “add and stir approach.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, Dara Kay Cohen, in her study of wartime rape in Sierra Leone, found that female combatants perpetrated rapes of civilians, which is usually thought of as violence typical of men.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, adding women to the forces as a measure to check against abuses might not be an effective strategy to prevent extra-judicial actions.

To date, the government has not really addressed the root causes of the problem, which lie in how the forces are trained and the lack of prosecution for human rights abuses. Adding more women to the force, while progressive in addressing gender representation, is unlikely to reduce such violations in the combat against the Maoist insurgency. The government needs to take stronger action by investigating the alleged human rights violations by armed forces in conflict zones and prosecuting those responsible.

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# WHEN A MAN LOVES YOUR BODY MORE THAN THE SOMEBODY OF YOU

Diksha Biljani

**YOU DO NOT** see it coming

Instead, you build a reservoir of romance  
Him, the hard wood door  
You, no latch or windows,  
And it is a story.

I'm 20 and still trying to  
Put my fingers over love  
To read the idea of it like it was Braille  
Because I am the blind one;  
He says "tell me the nastiest  
Thing you can do to me  
In a hundred and forty characters"  
And suddenly I am thankful  
For the long distance,  
He says I have nice hands  
And I imagine them in his, grip-tight  
While he imagines them  
Holding parts of him  
That are not his hands  
This was  
Never about soul.

And my friends say  
"Tell me about the first kiss"  
How do I slip in details of want to them  
How do I say  
"But he must like my soul  
To have held me that way,"

It does not matter that  
Every conversation now starts After a new Instagram photo Every display is an invite  
And every night he sleeps  
Alone in his bed he thinks  
Of me from down south  
Of his love-hiding body compass—But he does think of me,  
I can tell them he said hi first.

Because we're women who scoff  
At movie plots selling our bodies to men  
As a prelude to love,  
But we get caught in the sequels anyway,  
When a man loves your body  
More than the somebody of you  
Remind yourself it is not a sin,  
They've been doing it for years  
Us women have too many feelings  
This business of lovemaking  
Is still in the making, you'll come out sexualized too. No strings attached  
Because he will not hold the other end;  
No strings attached  
because you said no;  
No strings attached  
because these strings  
Are meant to strangle the idea of love

Out of teenage girls  
Who will spend their lives wanting  
To know if they can be wanted,  
And realize that they are always wanted, That there will always be men  
Who want them, us brown girls  
Who look at the hair on our body as the only Abomination that stops men from visiting,  
Our virginity sits softly in our laps and we wait For the next right one to let go of it  
Knowing it may be the only time  
We get to decide what happens on the bed—If we are lucky.

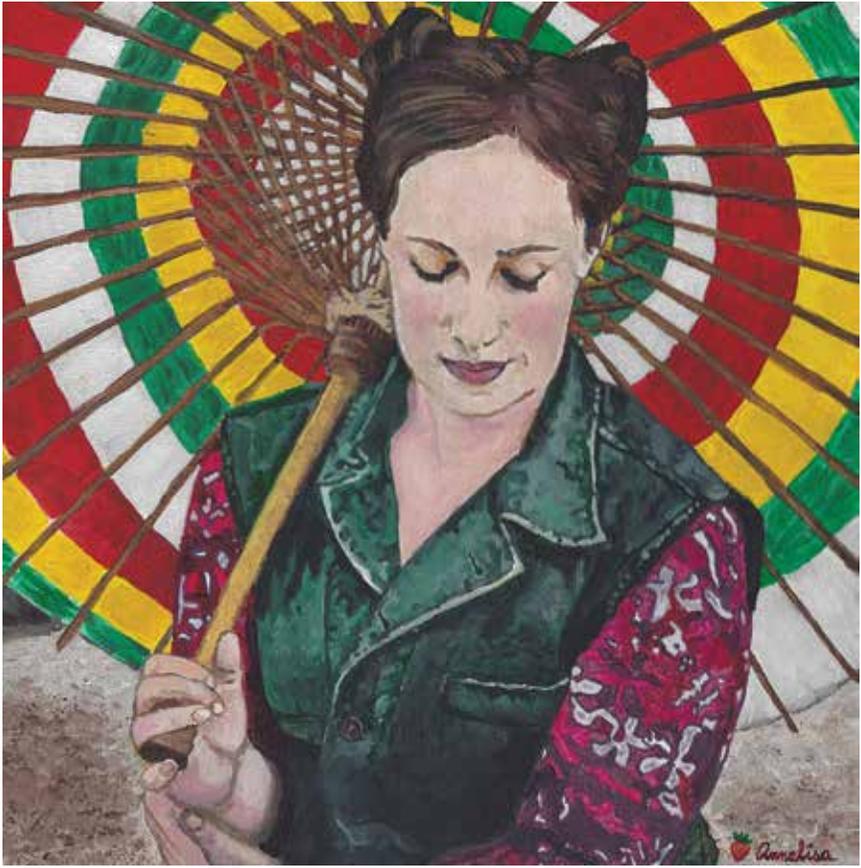
When a man wants only the circumference of you  
Do not sit at the center and watch yourself disappear, When a man wants everything about  
you but you Remember, he is just a man,  
A descendant of Adam,  
Of all that the folklore warned us against,  
He is the shadow of desire,  
His name slips in between  
Casting couches and sex offenses  
And comes out untouched,  
Unmarred, undebauched—it is you  
Who must imagine love into this story,  
Tell your epidermis to neutralize  
Attention with attraction  
Electricity with the spark  
Desire with initiative—at least he asked out first.

You tell yourself your integrity is still intact  
That there is no version of the story where  
He is in love with you and you are not just curves and endings, That these boys calling us  
by our first name is a privilege when In their fantasies we are nameless,  
You tell yourself when he comes home at night  
Lights dim like this love,  
The first thing he reaches out for  
Is the most important part of him,  
The first thing you reach out for  
Is a fairytale.

# ART AS POWER

**“HERE THERE AND** EVERYwhere (htE) is a nonprofit, repurposed goods platform based in NYC that provides survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking with an avenue for creative expression. While incorporating healing arts and ethical design concepts, survivors are taught vocational and entrepreneurial skills in sewing, jewelry making and crafts to bring new life to discarded items. I started htE in 2014 while volunteering with a Residential Children’s Arts program at a Brooklyn shelter. I realized then that there were not enough creative arts-based programs for adult survivors of trauma, and after experiencing the healing benefits of art-making firsthand, I began to conceptualize htE. Since then we have expanded our program to allow participants the opportunity to explore many platforms for creative expression such as storytelling, theater, filmmaking, and more. Many of our participants continue to create outside of our workshops as well, such as the artworks you see here! These were made by two of our participants who are always experimenting and love to paint on their own free time!”

Tanya Gupta, Co-Founder and Executive Director of here there and EVERYwhere  
([www.htEVERYwhere.com](http://www.htEVERYwhere.com))



## COSPLAY EMPOWERMENT

Artist: Annalisa

Since I was a child, one of the things I found fascinating was the power of costumes at Halloween, when you set aside how you saw yourself, how the world labeled you, and freely expressed yourself for a day. As conventions and cosplay became more popular, I saw a year-round extension of this. Whether covered head-to-toe unrecognizably in layers of painted foam, dressed in something not safe for work, or somewhere in between, what I observed was not only a bonding of strangers over shared interests and themes, but more importantly, an exploration in self-confidence. It is very empowering!

I have been fortunate enough to have attended my favorite accessible convention a few times, and I made a call-out for those who'd be willing to let me practice acrylic painting—and practice sitting up for short stints. I am an artist with multiple, mostly hidden disabilities and consider myself a “spoonie”—I chip away at everything, taking life one hour, one day at a time. In the case of paintings, that means a photograph is a must! This is my interpretation of cosplaymodel InevitableBetrayal as Kaylee from the TV show, *Firefly*. I knew little about the character being cosplayed until after I did the painting—what drew me to do this work was a radiating quiet confidence, contentment, and joy—not to mention that very colorful parasol!

You can follow me on Instagram at @songseeress.



## **LIBERDADE**

Artist: Regina P.

Medium: Oil on canvas

This artwork was made in honor of women's freedom. I've always been attracted to the vibrancy and the complexity of the body's movements in combination with nature. This expression of movement comes from my heart. Music has the power to bring me so much magical inspiration that comes to me in waves, like the scent of perfume, with energy and vivacity! It has been amazing to feel this total connection with my soul. Creating every artwork is a challenge in my experience of painting, but it has been a huge pleasure that all of our souls are involved in this unexpected result when collaborating. These works are a picture of my feelings, of my heart, and of my gratitude. I hope this artwork gives the viewer a sense of those emotions I felt.

# **REPRESENTATION AND POWER**



## ***Now Ladies Get in Formation***

### **FORMATION**

Marie Perrot

# WHY DON'T MORE WOMEN RUN CITIES?

Hannah Walker

*Hannah Walker is a Master's in Public Policy candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and alum of "From Harvard Square to Oval Office"—a skill-building and mentorship opportunity for women interested in running for office.*

**IN NOVEMBER 2018**, Sheryl Sculley retired as San Antonio's City Manager after 13 years in the position. Her replacement, chosen by San Antonio's City Council, was Erik Walsh.

The story was covered by local news with little fanfare—a 40-year management veteran to be replaced by a 24-year management veteran. But this event is important because of who Sheryl Sculley is: one of the only female city managers of a large US city.

According to a 2014 report by the International City/County Management Association Task Force on Women, women fill only 14.4 percent of the 3,586 city manager positions nationwide.<sup>1</sup> While female mayoral representation has steadily risen over the past two decades, the number of female

city managers has been stagnant since 1981.<sup>2</sup> Despite a rising number of female municipal employees, the 14.4 percent figure has stuck. Of the top 25 most populous US cities, eight of whom have a strong city manager, there are currently no women in the top management position.<sup>3</sup>

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The council-manager form of government gives an elected council the power to appoint a city manager. This system empowers the city manager to make operational and administrative decisions, while the council determines policy. City managers in these forms of government are known as "strong" city managers. In this capacity, they have the formal power to shape local governments' policies and financial health. They hire and fire city staff, provide budget recommendations, negotiate with unions, and operate as a gatekeeper for large infrastructure investments. In contrast, a mayor-council system empowers a directly elected mayor to create policy and enact administration positions. Some mayor-council systems will have city managers or city administrators, but they are

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generally not given the same formal power as in council-manager systems. In the United States, council-manager systems operate in over 50 percent of the largest cities.<sup>4</sup>

Since city managers are appointed, not elected, they have a degree of insulation from political pressure. They can enact financial choices that are tough in the short term without having to worry about sacrificing re-election. The fact that the position is appointed, though, can also be a hurdle to increasing representation. Unlike roles in the halls of Congress, or governors' and mayors' offices, where we saw a historic number of women elected in 2018, the city manager role cannot be filled by the ballot box. Hiring is left up to the seven, ten or 12 City Council members, who have shut out female leadership for decades.

Sculley managed a \$2.7 billion budget, and almost 12,000 city employees. During her tenure, she decided when to negotiate pensions for city police and firefighters. She pushed to fund pre-K programs and earned San Antonio a AAA bond rating, making it the only US city with over one million people to do so.<sup>5</sup> Despite the immense responsibility she faced and the financial prowess she exhibited, she faced sharper criticism than her male counterparts in Austin and Dallas. People described her management style as "hard" and "corporate."<sup>6</sup>

### **WHY IS THE 14.4 PERCENT SO STICKY?**

One theory is that there aren't enough women qualified for the position. But as we have seen with the dismal number of female CEOs, the absence of female city managers is not a "pipeline problem."<sup>7</sup> Every year, thousands of master's degree students, many of whom identify as women, graduate from public policy schools with the exact skillset needed to run a city. Today, almost 40 percent of city managers have a master's in public administration as their highest degree.<sup>8</sup>

Another theory is that there aren't enough manager mentors to groom a younger

generation of potential female city managers. Patricia March, City Manager of Daly City, California, pursued the position in part because of a manager mentor who saw her potential. She noted that it "wasn't always the case for many women . . . I was one of the lucky ones."<sup>9</sup>

Possibly lying beneath the 14.4 percent are forms of conscious and unconscious bias. Bias around who's "qualified," particularly with respect to handling financial responsibilities, may lead city councils to choose men for the role. While research on city management and gender bias is limited, we can learn from the dynamics of corporate boardrooms choosing CEOs. At DuPont, former CEO Ellen Kullman noted that, when women weren't being considered for top positions, "it wasn't as overt as 'she's too aggressive' . . . it came down more to, 'we're not sure she's ready for that job.'"<sup>10</sup>

After Sculley announced her retirement in San Antonio, the City Council narrowed the city manager search to two internal options: Deputy Manager Eric Walsh and Assistant Manager María Villagómez. In the Council decision to choose Walsh, Mayor Roy Nirenberg said, "I think we may very well see two city managers for San Antonio . . . perhaps María's time just hasn't come yet, but she is every bit as qualified to run a big city as Erik is, and Erik was just ready right now."<sup>11</sup>

### **HOW DO WE CHANGE THIS?**

Without a conscious effort to provide sincere mentorship and dismantle bias in Council chambers, women will continue to be shut out of city manager opportunities. It's not a supply problem. Women like María Villagómez and Sheryl Sculley are graduating every year from public administration programs across the country. City leaders, engaged residents, and policy students alike should demand more diverse gender representation in the pothole-filling, apartment-condo-approving, budget-setting city manager role. Otherwise, the 14.4 percent will continue to stick.

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# BUILDING AMERICA'S BACKBENCH

Rebecca Kriegman

*Rebecca Kriegman is an MPP student at the Kennedy School focused on representation of women and diverse voices in elected office and citizen engagement with government. She previously served as Chief of Staff to New York State Senator Brad Hoylman, where she advised on women's issues and election policy.*

**THE 2016 ELECTIONS** dealt a crushing blow to women. But in its wake, a new urgency and optimism emerged. After the elections, over 26,000 women reached out to the pro-choice political action committee, EMILY's List, for help launching a campaign, about 30 times more women than in the previous cycle.<sup>1</sup> A record number of women ran at every level in the midterms, and a record number of women won. Well over 100 women were sworn into Congress in January, including the first two Muslim women elected to Congress, the first two Native American women, and the youngest woman ever to be elected to Congress.<sup>2</sup> America is changing who is sitting on the backbench.

But that bench we've built is still not deep enough.

If we want a future with strong, experienced female leaders at every level of government, we must look deeper than congressional races. It starts locally. Investment in women in local and state offices has never been more crucial. State and local wins for women make meaningful changes in people's everyday lives, boost candidates on every level of the ballot, and build a backbench of experienced women for higher offices.

The number of women serving in state legislatures has more than quintupled since 1971.<sup>3</sup> However, what that looks like is an increase from single-digit percentages to the mid- or high twenties—far below parity in nearly every state.<sup>4</sup> While nine women were sworn in as governors in 2019, including the first woman of color, women still make up less than 20 percent of governors.<sup>5</sup> Women of color remain underrepresented in state offices, making up just 6.2 percent of the total number of state legislators nationwide.<sup>6</sup>

Electing more women and more diverse voices into our political pipeline is not just good for the national talent pool—it's good for the millions of women impacted by state governments' decisions every day. In Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, women now make up over 40 percent of the state legislature.<sup>7</sup> At least 17 legislatures saw an increase of five percentage points or more in the representation of women. In many of those states, that representation is already making a difference:

- In Nevada, the first state to achieve a numerical majority of women, with women making up 50.8 percent of its

legislature—a large jump from 38 percent last year—legislative leaders have prioritized increasing penalties for sex trafficking and eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual assault during this session.<sup>8</sup>

- In New York, the number of women jumped from 28 percent to 33 percent. For the first time in the state's history, a legislative body will be led by a woman of color. Less than two months into its legislative session, New York held hearings on sexual harassment<sup>9</sup> and passed legislation to codify and expand abortion protections, guarantee cost-free contraception, and prohibit employers from discriminating against employees for reproductive health decisions.<sup>10</sup>
- Colorado's state house is now 45 percent women, up from 38 percent, with women holding powerful positions like Speaker of the House and Majority and Minority Whips.<sup>11</sup> The House has already passed a comprehensive sex education bill that requires schools to teach about consent and healthy relationships. The legislative leadership has announced plans to prioritize policies around paid family leave and sexual harassment throughout this session.<sup>12</sup>

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- New Mexico's statehouse is now 35 percent women, up from 30 percent, and its House has already passed a bill decriminalizing abortion.<sup>13</sup> With the first Democratic woman, Michelle Lynn Lujan Grisham, elected governor of the state and a newly held Democratic trifecta, this measure is expected to become law.
- Connecticut, which saw a jump to 34 percent women from 27 percent, is expected to pass paid family leave legislation, private insurance to cover reproductive health services with no copay, regulate so-called "crisis pregnancy centers," and ban employers from discriminating against workers based on their reproductive health choices.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond direct impact in states and local communities, investing in compelling female candidates locally can impact races at every level. Amanda Litman, the founder of Run for Something, a grassroots group created after Trump's election, coined the phrase "reverse coattails," referring to increased attention and turnout for down-ballot races fueling higher voter response to national races.<sup>15</sup>

Reverse coattails work because the more local candidates engage with and speak to real voters, the greater authentic connection voters feel with candidates, the more likely voters are to turn out, and the more successful candidates are up and down the ballot. For too long, Democratic party institutions have largely refused to invest resources locally and have missed out on the opportunity to build the party from the ground up.

Without formal support from the national party, community leaders, mostly women, took the helm of making change with new grassroots groups that bolstered candidates during the 2018 midterms.<sup>16</sup> One of these groups, Indivisible, has over 6,000 local

groups nationwide—more than the Tea Party, a small-government conservative group active in the 2010 midterm elections, had at its peak. Indivisible chapters are made up of about 70 percent women, and a vast number of Indivisible chapters pushed forward and supported candidates running at the local, state, or national level in 2018. While we don't have a measurement of their precise impact in the midterms, movement-building groups like Indivisible and Run for Something are partially to thank for a voter turnout surge, helping local and national candidates alike.

Finally, the most frequently cited reason to invest in state and local women candidates is that it builds a strong, viable candidate pool for national office. A brief look into some of the highest-profile women in Washington in both parties confirms the importance of local public service in achieving higher office. Fourteen of the 25 women currently serving in the US Senate formerly served in their state legislatures.<sup>17</sup> Of the remaining 11 who did not, one was a mayor of a major city, one served as a state cabinet member, one was an elected county attorney, two served as state attorneys general, one directed a state-level department, and one served as lieutenant governor. Only four female US senators did not previously serve as an elected or appointed official in state or local government. In the House, over 60 of the 102 female members previously served in statehouses or in city councils.<sup>18</sup>

These former state and local representatives built name recognition and reputations through service in their communities. When the time came to run for an open Senate or House seat or challenge an incumbent, their constituents and the party already knew them, trusted them, and voted for them.<sup>19</sup> They demonstrated that the backbench does work.

We know investment in state and local races is important. So, what now? We can't fuel long-term, lasting parity on anger and inspiration alone. Community and grassroots-based

infrastructure delivered results in the midterms, but we need leadership from the top too. Increased spending and promotion by the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC) for women and people of color in 2018 is hopefully a sign that the party is taking parity and diversity more seriously. This cycle, over half of the DLCC's so-called "spotlight" races, which give candidates increased national exposure and funding, were female candidates.<sup>20</sup>

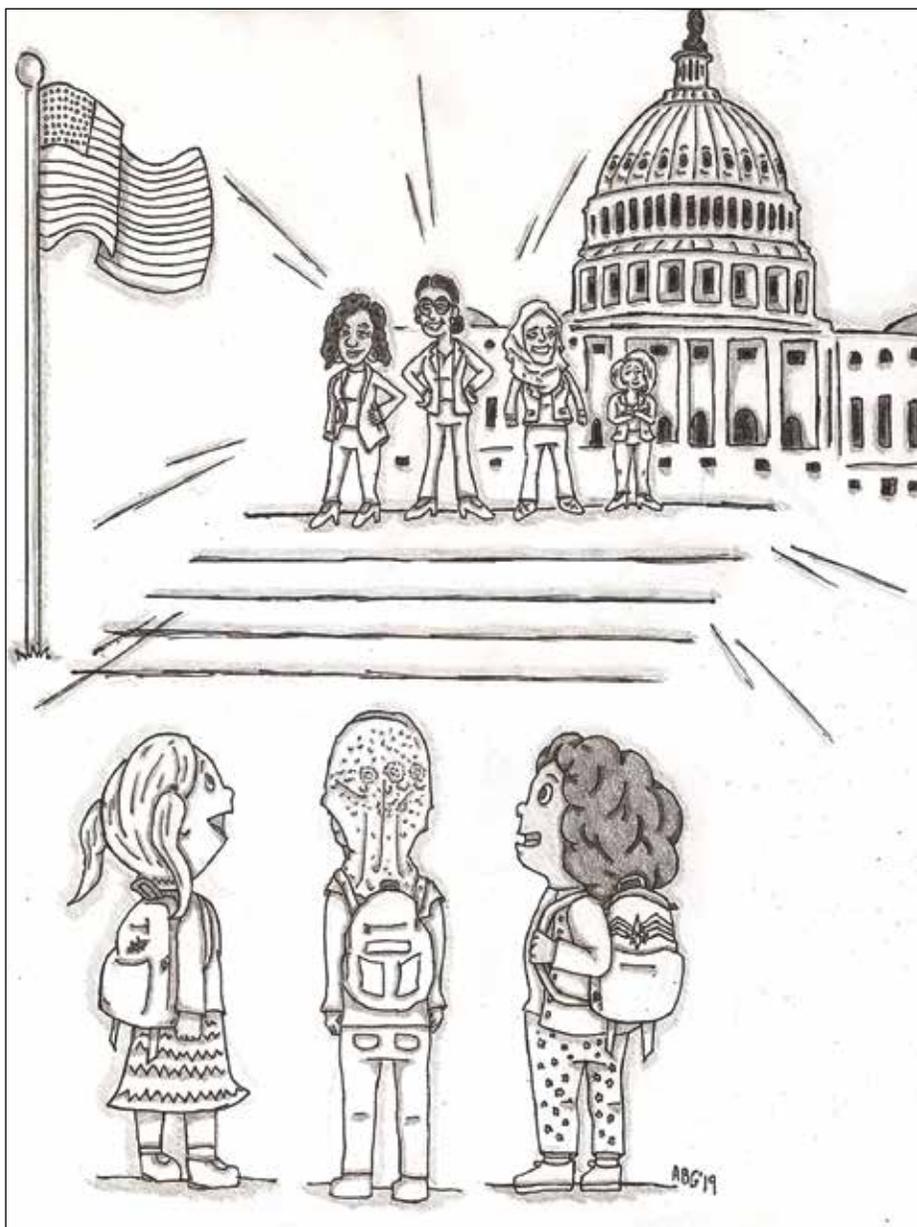
However, formal Democratic institutions like the DLCC and the DNC have not historically invested in long-shot runs, let alone incumbent primary challengers.<sup>21</sup> Until this past cycle, the national party's unwillingness to put its power and money behind these candidates, frequently women of color, has contributed to the historically slow drip of zero to one percentage point gain in representation each year.<sup>22</sup>

After this election cycle, the Democratic party should know the power that national momentum can have over local and state races—and vice versa: diverse local candidates and activism can shift national elections. If the party continues to ignore down-ballot state and local races at its own peril, it will ultimately fail to produce high-quality candidates for higher office. Just as critically, it will fail to protect its interests state-by-state.

Party institutions must follow the lead of grassroots groups and invest in electing women at the state and local level. Not only will it fortify progressive policies and bolster candidates up and down the ballot—it will yield a new generation of female candidates for Congress and for the White House, strengthening and improving the party's long-term viability. If we want to protect the interests of women and girls at the local level, boost voter turnout, and generate equity in our federal government, we must start by putting women in the State House.

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## THE FUTURE IS NOW

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# EL COMEDOR

## FEMALE MIGRANTS IN CHARGE

Thanh Mai Bercher

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*Note: The terms “refugee,” “migrant,” and “asylum seeker” will be used interchangeably. These terms do have specific definitions; however, individuals relate to them differently. While not all migrants may meet the legal definition of an asylum seeker, they may identify as such. For these reasons, groups and individuals will be labeled under a mix of said terms.*

**LESS THAN HALF** a mile from the US border on a street corner in Tijuana, Mexico sits a small orange kitchen. Like other restaurants on the block, El Comedor typically has a steady stream of people lingering and picking up conversations while music bumps in the background. Yet there is no shortage of things that set El Comedor apart. Run exclusively by female migrants from Central America, El Comedor provides consistent meals and a safe place for migrants to meet. Under the leadership of Gabby, a 21-year-old migrant from El Salvador, women have found power and purpose by self-organizing and uplifting their community on their own terms. Within the ongoing struggle for autonomy and recognition throughout the migration process, the women of El Comedor are upending gender

hierarchies and leading community-centered efforts for survival.

El Comedor—which translates to “dining room” or “the kitchen”—was born out of the caravan of 5,000 migrants making its way from Honduras to the United States in October 2018.<sup>1</sup> After making its way through Mexico, the caravan was stranded in Tijuana, at the US border. Governmental and policy shifts left asylum seekers in limbo between the US and Mexico, with precarious social services and humanitarian benefits. Incoming donations for the migrants were taken into a guarded government warehouse, where soldiers restricted distribution. Officials refused to speak with the caravan’s self-elected committee and interfered with the caravan’s ability to work with international organizations, volunteers, and local groups. Migrants began to leave the camp in search of other shelter, and the once-unified body was dispersed throughout the city.

In line with the community-based origins of the caravan, 500 migrants chose to stick together and established an autonomous shelter in an abandoned warehouse. Gabby saw an opportunity and vocalized her idea

for a kitchen. Although she had never had a formal job or cooked outside of her home, Gabby felt a strong call to action and was able to recruit, manage, and organize people. After working with volunteers to source cheap kitchen supplies and ingredients, Gabby began waking up at 4:00 a.m. every day to cook and serve meals. She appointed women to lead teams responsible for picking up donations, preparing ingredients, setting up cooking and serving spaces, and organizing people to eat. Her leadership gave a sense of structure to those who were anxious about the uncertainty that awaited them outside.

The community-centered approach that the women employed stood in stark contrast to the state-imposed interventions. During meals in government shelters, there were no accommodations for pregnant women, people with disabilities, families with young children, or the elderly. People felt the stress of soldiers' orders and the often-frenzied scheduling of meal times. Families couldn't eat together and those who were sick or couldn't stand in line for hours often went without food. The unity the caravan had formerly valued was not possible to sustain within the government space.

In contrast, Gabby and her team created a community-oriented space that allowed people to relax and pass food to others before themselves, knowing that there would be enough for everyone. Elders and pregnant women had their food brought to them and did not wait in line, and families were able to eat in a play space with their children. Men began volunteering to help the teams and Gabby notes that this offer solidified the role of women as leaders within the community.

While the shelter was evicted after a few weeks, the female-led team remained intact. Gabby and her team found a restaurant just a few blocks away and worked with local groups to fundraise money to lease it. They established the kitchen as a continuation of the community caretaking they had provided in

the shelter. Their meals didn't just bring people together; they upended gender hierarchies and expectations. The leadership team is all female, with Gabby and several women serving as head cooks, while their partners play supporting roles. In its functions, the space is as flexible and adaptive as its participants. After only a few weeks of operation, the collective opened a donation center on the rooftop using donated and found materials. The new resources brought in more diners and expanded conversations around the future of the kitchen as a space for community organizing and employment. In a larger sense, it has become a social and economic institution for migrants. When asked about what it feels like to run such an important space with a team of women, Gabby laughs and replies, "I like women being in charge. It's about time women rule the world."

The newfound leadership of women in El Comedor is emblematic of the power the new caravan structure has in upending gender dynamics and trends in global migration. Traditional migration routes are secretive and therefore smaller, offering women little visibility and protection from abuse. Sexual and gender-based violence during displacement throughout Central America can deter women from migrating; as a result, men dominate the global migration path. The share of female migrants has not changed tremendously in the past 60 years, and female migrants still face stronger discrimination and are more vulnerable to mistreatment.<sup>2</sup> Sexual and gender-based violence also influences the choices of women who do decide to migrate. Women more frequently hire smugglers and are less likely to access migrant routes and resources, such as public trains and migrant shelters. Since traveling alone most often exacerbates the risks women face, the shift towards the caravan structure was revolutionary for women—providing them with the safety and support necessary for survival. While this has

## REFUGEE-LED SPACES, SUCH AS THE SHELTER AND THE KITCHEN, MODEL THE TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITIES THAT EMERGE IN LOW-RESOURCE SETTINGS.

not eliminated sexual and gender-based violence along the journey, these community structures have offered protection and led to growth among female migrant populations.

Migrant adaptations for survival may be superficially misconstrued as camaraderie, but should be recognized as more. The act of migrating as a group was a reclamation—moving away from the treacherous grips of traffickers and individual passages that often lead to abuse, rape, and murder. With community protection mitigating these risks, vulnerable individuals are more likely to survive and thrive. This has created more opportunities for women to be active members of migration efforts and recognized leaders within the community, so that women like Gabby are able to shape resources in ways that governments are not. Refugee-led spaces, such as the shelter and the kitchen, model the transformative opportunities that emerge in low-resource settings. El Comedor is a vital continuation of the visibility and shared resources offered by the caravan, one that exemplifies the space that women have carved out for themselves.

The community-led origins of the kitchen have served as an entry point for women to claim and establish their role in Tijuana's growing migrant community. For many, this has re-framed what the migratory path looks like and where they hope to plant roots. Now that she has a space to call her own, Tijuana feels more like home to Gabby. She feels deeply connected to the people around her, who, despite being from different countries, are her community. She notes that she's not holding her breath for asylum in the United States, and is considering staying in Mexico. She's not the only one.

Some of El Comedor's diners are beginning to see the kitchen, and Tijuana, as their new destination. "Being here, I stopped looking at the United States as the only dream. What makes this place special is the people," Gabby says.

Gabby's words ring true as the kitchen team gathers on the rooftop to celebrate El Comedor's one-month anniversary. People turn on music and throw smiles down at the kids playing in the street, grateful to have finished another full day. The kitchen faces south, and from the rooftop, there is a panoramic view of Tijuana's central arch and the sloping green hills, colorful favelas, and coastline extending in the background. As the sun sets and the hills begin to light up, no one is looking back at the border.

"Estados Unidos no es el único sueño." The United States is not the only dream.

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# THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF GENDER-LENS INVESTING

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-lens investing (GLI) has emerged as one of the fastest-growing areas of impact investing over the past decade. Gender equality is not just a box-ticking exercise anymore and the number of female board members is no longer the only indicator of empowerment available. Investment in women is becoming understood as an opportunity, and GLI is based in this ambition of changing the way gender is valued in finance. Ultimately, the aspiration of GLI is to make gender matter when decisions are made in financial markets and to turn finance into a tool for social transformation. Nonetheless, GLI also faces major challenges that cast its transformative ambitions into doubt. Because the intended impacts have different time horizons, they can be hard to measure. The high complexity and slow speed of change in women's empowerment make it difficult to discern which approach is most "impactful." More broadly, GLI and the framing of gender equality as "smart economics" run the risk of eclipsing human rights discourse, instrumentalizing equity as a solely economic issue. After a short overview of the state of the field, this paper

will explore the opportunities of GLI as well as its more problematic sides and discuss to what extent it can truly make a difference.

The Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) defines gender-lens investing as "investment strategies applied to an allocation or to the entirety of an investment portfolio, which 1) seek to intentionally and measurably address gender disparities and/or 2) examine gender dynamics to better inform investment decisions."<sup>1</sup> Thus, there isn't one way to do gender-lens investing, not least of all because the differences in the enabling environment and product-specific contexts (e.g., developed and developing countries, regions, markets) make different approaches necessary and more relevant.<sup>2</sup> There are three major ways of creating impact through GLI:<sup>3</sup>

First, improving women's access to finance by investing directly in women-run businesses, which face a global financing gap of around \$300 billion—some estimates project this gap up to \$1.5 trillion.<sup>4</sup> This approach is relevant both in developed and developing countries, as the implicit discrimination and biases against female business owners when it comes to access to finance—as well as

networks and mentoring—is a universal phenomenon. The major players here are venture capital investors, incubators, and accelerators, as well as commercial banks, all of whom could provide female entrepreneurs with capital, loans, and business support.

Secondly, investors can support workplace equity and inclusive sourcing by investing consciously in firms that promote equal opportunity, wage equity, and women's leadership, or that have gender-sensitive family and supply chain diversification policies. The main challenge of this approach is a lack of transparency from firms as reporting practices differ and the effect on women is less direct. In particular, women in developing countries only benefit from this practice insofar as they are part of those companies' supply chains. Nevertheless, if better gender equity policies become widely seen as an aspirational standard and relevant to the bottom line throughout the private sector, the long-term effects of this type of GLI could be more transformative and widespread than investing directly in women entrepreneurs, at least in developed contexts.

A third possibility is investing in companies that offer products that are geared towards women and girls, especially in developing countries, where they often lack access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, microcredit, etc. This approach affects the women who are most marginalized and in need, but is difficult to scale, and requires building very scattered portfolios.

With enough understanding of the factors impacting women's empowerment, investors can also choose to invest in issues that disproportionately affect women even without an explicit gender focus, such as access to electricity and clean water, climate change resilience, improving the productivity of smallholder farming, and more.

The proponents of GLI hope that, next to these direct investment strategies, the discourse and "buzz" that have been brought on

by GLI will change the way gender is viewed in business and finance overall. Raised awareness should lead to improved corporate governance and greater inclusion of gender concerns more broadly, even if firms are not—yet—directly affected by GLI. This increased inclusion of gender concerns can comprise gender-sensitive risk assessments of investments,<sup>5</sup> or the development of products more targeted towards women customers and their needs, for example in the insurance industry.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE FIELD

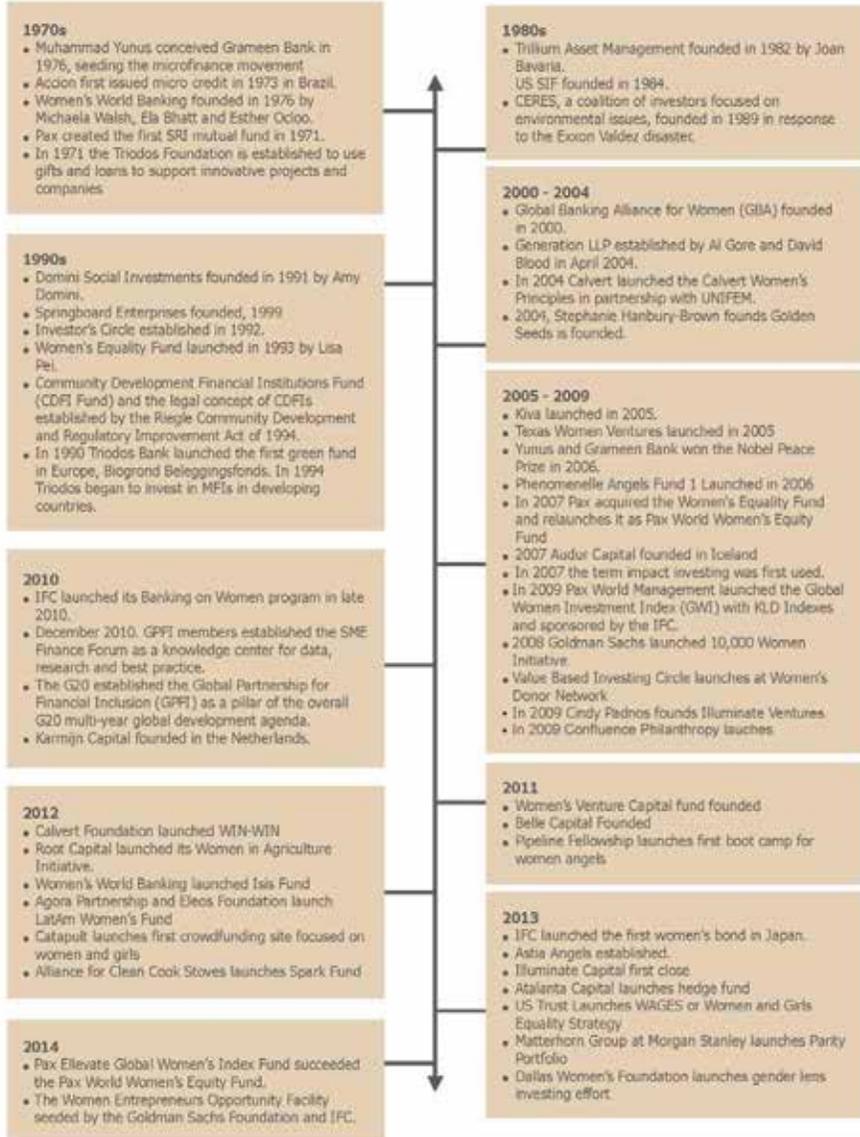
International development institutions like the IFC have been promoting the "business case" for investing in women since the mid-2000s, primarily focused on the financial sector through women's access to capital and female entrepreneurship. Political developments like the #MeToo movement and the Women's Marches in the United States have further increased the visibility of gender issues and the importance of addressing gender-based violence and inequality in the workplace. According to Veris Wealth Partners' CEO, GLI "has gained more interest faster among clients than anything since the divest/investment movement around climate change."<sup>6</sup> Based on Veris' numbers, the volume of GLI in publicly traded securities has ballooned from \$100 million in 2014 to \$910 million in the first half of 2017.<sup>7</sup> Project Sage screened 58 private equity funds and found that they deployed over \$1.3 billion in capital with a gender lens.<sup>8</sup> Considering the total value of traded stocks in 2017 was \$77.6 trillion<sup>9</sup> and the respondents to the GIIN's 2018 Annual Impact Investor Survey reported \$228.1 billion in impact investing assets (whilst the socially responsible investing volume overall is estimated at around \$6.6 trillion), this is still a small share. However, the excitement around GLI is also a much more recent phenomenon, and the 2018 Gender-smart Investment Summit in London had a potential of several billion USD of investments in the room, according to a conference participant, so there is great potential for future growth.

Indeed, 70 percent of the GIIN Survey respondents (n = 229) apply a gender lens to their investment process, up from only a third in 2015—most commonly by seeking portfolio

companies that target women beneficiaries, followed by those with proactive internal gender policies, and firms that are led or owned by women.<sup>10</sup>

## MILESTONES OF THE SOCIAL AND GENDER LENS FINANCE MOVEMENT

### TIMELINE 1: MILESTONES IN SOCIAL FINANCE MOVEMENTS



Source: Criterion Institute<sup>11</sup>

GLI has grown in relevance not just for investors and philanthropies, but also for academia and advocacy organizations. The latter hope that using the language of business when advocating for gender equality might be a more successful lever than the women's rights discourse alone, something I critically reflect on below. One such example of a traditionally feminist advocacy organization engaging the private sector with GLI-based arguments are UN Women's "Women's Empowerment Principles" (WEPs). These are seven principles that companies can sign on to in order to empower women in the workplace, marketplace, and in their communities, by ensuring equal treatment at work, promoting women's

professional development and leadership, and implementing inclusive supply chain and enterprise development. Since the WEPs' launch in 2010, around 800 companies have declared their support for the principles.

In 2017, the GIIN launched a two-year initiative that analyzes the opportunities and challenges connected to GLI, and its potential for scale. There are many other recent examples of pioneering efforts to establish GLI, among them the 2015 white paper on Investing for Positive Impact on Women by Trillium, Root Capital, the Global Fund for Women, Croatan Institute, and the Thirty Percent Coalition and the Criterion Institute's State of the Field report of the same year.

**TABLE I: EXAMPLES OF GLI INVESTORS**

TYPE	NAME	WHAT THEY DO
Public Equity	Pax Ellevest Global Women's Index Fund	Invest in companies committed to gender diversity on their boards of directors and in executive management, and that embrace policies such as the WEPs.  According to them, women hold 31 percent of board seats and 24 percent of senior management positions in their portfolio companies on average, with 97 percent of companies having at least two women board members, and 70 percent at least three.
	US Trust	They apply a gender lens to the asset classes of US equity and taxable corporate fixed income. They invest in companies based on a wide range of business practices and policies related to gender, such as hiring and promoting women; female representation in senior management and on the board; wage parity; opportunities for career advancement; policies on family leave; supply chain practices; and the portrayal of women and girls in advertising.
	Morgan Stanley	The Morgan Stanley Parity Portfolio is a separately managed account for high net worth individuals and institutional clients that focuses specifically on female board representation.
	Barclays	Their Women in Leadership Total Return Index includes companies with a female CEO or where at least one-fourth of the board of directors is female. They also have to meet specific market capitalization and trading volume thresholds. The Barclays Exchange Traded Notes (ETNs), which track the WIL Total Return Index, expose investors to US companies with gender-diverse executive leadership and governance. Barclays ETNs are senior, unsecured, unsubordinated debt securities issued by Barclays Bank PLC.

TYPE	NAME	WHAT THEY DO
Private Equity	Golden Seeds	This investment firm has a US-wide network of 275 angel investors and VC funds, focusing on women-led companies. Golden Seeds has invested over \$60 million in more than 60 of them since 2005.
Community Development & Microfinance	Calvert Foundation	Their Women Investing in Women Initiative (WIN-WIN) has made more than \$20 million in microfinance, small business, affordable housing and community development loans to women with the support of 800 individual and institutional investors. As the first widely available GLI instrument, this inspired others to follow.
	Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation	They focus on economic development in urban and rural areas by providing access to capital, business education, and financial awareness programs, especially to marginalized people.
	Root Capital	Root Capital is a non-profit social investment fund that invests mainly in agricultural enterprises in Africa and Latin America. Their Women in Agriculture Initiative, started in 2012, invests in industries that traditionally employ a large share of women, as well as in businesses founded and led by women.
	Women's World Banking	Through its global network of 39 microfinance institutions from 28 countries, WWB aims to create new credit, savings, and insurance products specifically designed for women.

Source: US SIF Foundation<sup>12</sup>

Other firms and investors that track gender performance and include GLI in parts of their portfolio are Veris Wealth Partners, Domini Social Investments, Glenmede Funds, State Street Global Advisors, and many more. (For a more complete overview of GLI-focused actors, see the list from the Criterion Institute's 2015 report in Annex I.)

### OPPORTUNITIES OF GLI

There is a multitude of arguments for empowering women in the economy, most commonly the assertion that organizations with diverse leadership perform better. Greater diversity of perspectives can improve innovation and mitigate group-think in corporate governance, and visible non-discrimination

attracts more young, driven, committed, and socially conscious talent, including highly-educated women. McKinsey's seminal "Women Matter" study and research<sup>13</sup> certainly has paved the way by demonstrating these effects, and now it's seen as "a proven theory as most of the women-focused funds and investment strategies—a tiny slice of the \$6.6 trillion-socially responsible investing world—have been standout performers over the years."<sup>14</sup>

Women's economic empowerment is also often cast as an important lever for poverty reduction. Many studies, spearheaded by international financial institutions like the World Bank, IFC, IMF, and OECD, have demonstrated that increasing women's economic opportunities, labor force participation, and

entrepreneurship can contribute significantly to GDP growth. It is seen as a central lever for sustainable development.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the microfinance industry has mainly focused on women, who tend to be perceived as more reliable and trustworthy in their repayment rates. This is a somewhat ironic reversal of their fortune when it comes to bigger loans and enterprise development: The global \$300 billion financing gap for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the staggering disparities in venture capital funding—even in the United States—testify to the fact that women's business acumen is still seldomly trusted.<sup>16</sup> Studies have shown that the effects of microfinance on promoting gender equality and women's economic activity are small or even negligible.<sup>17</sup> However, the expansion of this industry did change the debate significantly by presenting even poor women as valuable agents to invest in, and women's economic empowerment more broadly can still have important ripple effects on communities and economic growth. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that rural women's equal access to resources such as credit, land, farming inputs, training, and information would lead to an increase in food production that could reduce malnourishment in 100-150 million people.<sup>18</sup> Empowering women economically affects the health and education outcomes of their children, in whom they are more likely to invest than men.<sup>19</sup> The World Bank and IFC have thus labeled gender equality as "smart economics."<sup>20</sup>

In sum, GLI can be more transformative if it goes beyond investing in companies with more women on boards. Indeed, some claim that GLI "is about creating a new economic logic that bridges the market logic of financial returns with the feminist logic of women's equality."<sup>21</sup> However, this may be too optimistic, considering that these two "logics" are at most partially compatible, especially considering the substantial critique of the neoliberal

economic system by feminist economists such as Nancy Fraser, Naila Kabeer, and Shahra Razavi, to be discussed in more depth below.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Although there is growing evidence that investing with a gender lens is a financially sound and impactful decision in the long term, potential returns vary depending on the "strength" of the gender lens. Thus, the trade-off between the immediacy of financial return and impact remains. Investing in a social enterprise that produces safe cookstoves for rural women in developing countries will have higher risk and yield smaller returns than investing in a large multinational that promotes women's leadership in their management, but the impact on the lives of women in greater need will likely be more immediate and visible. On the other hand, changing organizational culture in large firms can have a ripple effect throughout the private sector and thereby lead to change on a greater scale from a structural perspective.

There are technical challenges linked to GLI that are common when investing for impact, such as the absence of large investment opportunities. Thus, portfolios have to be compiled from various smaller options that each have to be assessed, which can be time-consuming and very difficult to do.<sup>22</sup> This points to another issue—a lot of the information on gender equality in a company is qualitative, so it's hard to employ meaningful metrics to assess the gender impact. Just counting the number of women on a board will hardly be sufficient to assess a company's equal opportunity and human rights practices substantively. In particular, when there are no universal disclosure standards, the available information can differ widely. Once investors are looking to invest not just in US firms, but also abroad, this difficulty is further exacerbated, as language barriers and varying standards become increasingly challenging.<sup>23</sup> Thus, more effort and research are needed to

INTERCONNECTEDLY, HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS SEE GLI BOTH WITH INTEREST AND A WARY EYE, AS THEY RIGHTLY HIGHLIGHT THE DANGER OF “COMMODYING” GENDER EQUALITY.

find and assemble investment opportunities with a gender lens.

Interconnectedly, human rights organizations see GLI both with interest and a wary eye, as they rightly highlight the danger of “commodifying” gender equality. Considering how complex and contextualized women’s empowerment is, there is a danger of “pinkwashing” firms through GLI, meaning that anything remotely women-related (e.g., selling cosmetics) is framed as a gender lens, or symbolic appointments of women are presented as evidence of substantive equality.

Fortunately, new companies have sprung up that try to address the data problem. One example is Equileap (founded in 2015), which ranks and grades the global top 200 publicly listed companies based on women’s representation in their management and labor force, the existence of anti-harassment policies, adherence to ILO labor standards and the WEPs, pay parity, and paid parental leave. Equileap’s database includes over 3,200 companies, and also disaggregates its findings by countries and sectors.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, EDGE certifies corporations for workplace gender equality and WeConnect certifies women-owned businesses to be included as vendors in the supply chain of major corporations.

Yet a lot of work still needs to be done to establish a shared language and broader understanding of GLI, to streamline different frames and concepts from the finance and gender and empowerment fields, and to develop more intermediaries to facilitate and structure

this debate. This is an opportunity for think tanks and academia at the intersection of both sectors to clarify concepts, tools, and theories of change.<sup>25</sup> A big gap is the significant lack of gender-disaggregated data, which is essential to understanding the opportunities and challenges of GLI and to measuring “gender impact”—even facilitators like Equileap rely on companies collecting this data and making it available.<sup>26</sup> With gender equality and equal opportunity increasingly recognized as relevant to a company’s reputation and ability to attract talent, there’s hope that GLI might also lead to a push for greater transparency. Nonetheless, “there is a vital need for a broad-based research agenda informed by how systems of finance currently work and are changing but driven by organizations such as the International Center for Research on Women.”<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, women entrepreneurs still struggle to access capital worldwide. In the United States alone, where 98 percent of VC funding still goes into male-led start-ups, the “myth of meritocracy” continues to prevail over a critical debate on what constitutes “merit” and a “sound investment,” and how these notions themselves are gendered.<sup>28</sup> VC funds can also act as gatekeepers to socially-oriented investment being channeled to women, as within their 98 percent of funding, naturally the majority of funded *social* start-ups are also male-led. An ethical investor wanting to create impact and be gender-sensitive at the same time thus faces a dilemma: do they invest in a women-led business (which might have no social impact), or in a social enterprise that isn’t women-led?<sup>29</sup>

More fundamentally, there is also a danger to arguing for gender equality with a business case only—if it doesn’t work, or doesn’t work fast enough, it can lead to disappointment or run the risk of becoming a fad. Skeptics have pointed out that “Like all the rest, the ‘gender lens’ strategy will have its good times, and it

will have its hard times . . . So, follow a 'gender lens' investment strategy if it makes you feel good. Just don't count on making a killing in the market if you do."<sup>30</sup> This problem is more prevalent in the higher-risk, direct-impact investment strategies with a "stronger" gender lens, where expected returns are lower, but the social goal is central, such as the illustrative clean cookstove enterprise. However, even when investing in large firms that are, for example, gender-sensitive in their supply chains and recruitment policies, the "returns on gender" will only materialize in time. Thus, although there is evidence that gender-sensitive firms outperform their peers in the long run, it's important to manage expectations—to avoid GLI being judged as not having lived up to its promises fast enough or, worse, institutions turning away from investing in women once again.

## CONCLUSION

It's important to recognize that while GLI can have a significant impact by changing the way investment in women and gender issues is debated and by improving both transparency as well as—at least some—funding decisions, there is still a long way to go to achieve widespread appreciation for gender concerns in the finance world, let alone women's empowerment more broadly. Much more work is needed to create truly systemic change and a macroeconomic environment that can be considered remotely "feminist" or non-patriarchal. To transform how the neoliberal global economic discourse impacts and disadvantages women differentially around the world and to alter deeply entrenched power structures for greater equity, gender lens investing is hardly enough. For example, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) has demonstrated that despite new levels of interest in women and girls as investment-worthy individuals, this trend has hardly benefitted women's rights organizations that are often at the forefront of

**MORE FUNDAMENTALLY, THERE IS ALSO A DANGER TO ARGUING FOR GENDER EQUALITY WITH A BUSINESS CASE ONLY—IF IT DOESN'T WORK, OR DOESN'T WORK FAST ENOUGH, IT CAN LEAD TO DISAPPOINTMENT OR RUN THE RISK OF BECOMING A FAD.**

advancing substantive gender equality.<sup>31</sup> On a programmatic level, using highly aggregated numbers like the FAO did to make a business case may be staggering, but somewhat misleading, as women's empowerment is highly contextualized. Just "giving them access to resources" isn't enough when the institutional environment (e.g., laws, policies, informal social norms) or market structures might be prohibitive, or women lack the agency and skills needed to succeed in their businesses, or they face gender-based violence and restricted mobility, or suffer time scarcity due to unpaid care work.

In sum, making women relevant to the bottom line won't "solve" gender inequality as a whole, but it can do a lot in creating greater awareness and consideration of gender issues within the private sector. It thereby has the potential to be transformative by changing corporate culture, the logic of financial decision-making, the opportunity structure for women entrepreneurs, and the lives of poor women served by social enterprises that were able to receive capital for innovative ideas to combat poverty.

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# ANNEX I: A DETAILED MAP OF THE FIELD OF ACTORS IN GLI

Source: Anderson and Miles, *The State of the Field of Gender Lens Investing*, Appendix A.

<b>Organizing People and Organizations</b>	
<b>Foundations and philanthropies</b>	Wallace Global Fund, Dallas Women’s Foundation, Eileen Fisher Community Foundation, International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF), Calvert Foundation, Women’s Foundation of California, Nike Foundation, H&M Conscious Foundation, The Women’s Foundation Hong Kong, Global Fund for Women, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Stitching Doen (Foundation), Living Future Foundation, Women’s Foundation of Southern Arizona, Imagio Dei Fund, Weissberg Foundation, Thomson Reuters Foundation, Hunt Alternatives, Ford Foundation, Oak Foundation
<b>Networks of women entrepreneurs</b>	SheEO, Astia, Women Who Code (WWCode), Dell Women’s Entrepreneurship Network
<b>Networks of financial service providers</b>	Global Alliance for Banking on Values, Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), 100 Women in Hedge Funds, Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO), National Women’s Business Council (NWBC), Women’s World Banking, Women Effect, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN), Women in Social Finance, Springboard Expert Network, The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment (US SIF/US SIF Foundation),
<b>Networks of organizations working on gender issues</b>	Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), International Association for Feminist Economists, The Thirty Percent Coalition, Catalyst, Private Equity Women Investor Network, Spark, Girls in Tech, Global Banking Alliance for Women. Women Investing for a Sustainable Economy (WISE)
<b>Philanthropic and funding networks</b>	Women’s Funding Network, Women Donors Network, Women Moving Millions, Confluence Philanthropy, Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE), Kiva, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), Slow Money, Transform Finance, PYMWYMIC, Philanthropy Indaba, Inspired Philanthropy
<b>Conferences</b>	Social Capital Markets (SOCAP), Sankalp Forum, Opportunity Collaboration, Oxford Power Shift Forum for Women in the World Economy, Confluence Philanthropy, Trust Women Conference, Dell’s Women’s Entrepreneurship Network, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation High-Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN), She’s Geeky, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the UN, African Women’s Economic Summit, Female Founders Conference, the Women’s Private Equity Summit, Women’s Funding Network Conference, Women Donors Network Conference, Trust Women Conference by Thomson Reuters
<b>Organizing Ideas</b>	
<b>Media platforms</b>	Thomson Reuters, Impact Alpha (formerly Impact IQ), Bloomberg News, WAMC (51% Radio Show), Unreasonable Group
<b>Non-governmental organizations working on gender issues</b>	Oxfam, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), UN Women, OECD, CARE International, Women Deliver, Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, Technoserve, The Peace Company, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Count Me in for Women’s Economic Independence, WomanCare Global, Madre, New Faces New Voices

Business schools	The Wharton School's Wharton Social Impact Initiative (WSII), University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford, Simmons College School of Management (SOM)
Gender research organizations	International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Wellesley Centers for Women, Re:Gender, Criterion Institute, Babson College's Center for Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership, Initiative for Responsible Investment at the Hauser Center for Civil Society at Harvard University, World Council of Peoples for the UN, Catalytic Women
Consulting firms and capacity building orgs	Monitor Deloitte, Enclude, Value for Women, SustainAbility, Strategy& (formerly Booz & Co.), Catalyst at Large, Infinitely Possible Financial Coaching, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, Exemplar Companies, DCProject, Dietel Partners, Iva Kaufman Associates, Imagine Philanthropy, TRU2U, SVT Group, Women Gathering Project, Pique Ventures
Policy setting organizations	US SEC, Australian Stock Exchange (ASX)
<b>Organizing Investment Activity</b>	
Accelerators, incubators, and trainings	SheEO, Pipeline Fellowship, SPRING, Village Capital Incubator, Unreasonable Institute, Prosperity Collective, Women's Enterprise Center, Global Invest Her, Agora Partnerships, Prosperity Catalyst, Coca Cola's 5by20 Initiative, Springboard Enterprises
International development agencies	USAID, DFAT (Australia), DFID, Grand Challenges Canada, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), GIZ (Germany), Chemonics International
Development finance institutions	IFC, IDB, OPIC, World Bank, EBRD, ADB
Ratings, indexes and certification programs	GIIRS, B Lab, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), CDFI Assessment and Ratings System (CARS), Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS), EDGE, We Connect, Fairtrade International, Gender Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index/Female Entrepreneurship Index by Dell and Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute, Barclays Women in Leadership Index and ETN, Pax Ellevest Global Women's Index Fund
Investment banks and capital marketplaces	Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Barclays, Daiwa Securities Group, Mission Markets
Investment managers and funds	Calvert Foundation (including WIN-WIN), Root Capital, Pax World/Pax World Funds/Pax World Management, Texas Women Ventures, Oxfam's WISE Fund, Honeybee Capital, Community Capital Management, EXXclaim Capital, Astarte Ventures, Sankhya Fund/Sankhya Private Partners, Breckinridge Capital Advisors, Honeybee Capital, Village Capital, Lotus Impact, Enclude (Triodos Facet and Shorebank International), Gray Matters Capital, ImpactAssets, Domini Social Investments, Trillium Asset Management, Pique Venture Investments, Aperio, Makeda Capital, Nia Community Fund, Boston Common Asset Management, Earth Asset Partnership, Invested Development, Vodia Ventures, Female Founders Fund, Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF)
Investment advisors and wealth managers	Veris Wealth Partners, Imprint Capital, U.S. Trust, Sapers & Wallack, Chanel Family Assets, Silver Bridge Advisors (now bought by Banyan Partners), Busara Advisors, Cambridge Associates, Morgan Stanley Wealth Management
Banks and credit unions	Vancouver City Savings Credit Union (Vancity), Self-Help Federal Credit Union
Angel networks	Investors' Circle, Golden Seeds, Astia Angels, 37 Angels, JPH Associates, ClearlySo Angels
Crowd funding platforms	Catapult, MoolaHoop



**NEW  
LENSES  
ON  
FEMINISM**

# MISOGYNY AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Nikila Kaushik

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**IN 2012, AUSTRALIA'S** first woman prime minister, Julia Gillard, made headlines around the world when she used a speech in Parliament to call the leader of the opposition, Tony Abbott, a misogynist. "I will not be lectured to about sexism and misogyny by this man," Gillard began, before listing, over the course of 15 minutes, examples of Abbott's comments about women, power, and politics.<sup>1</sup> During a conversation about women's representation in public office, for instance, Abbott had mused, "What if men are, by physiology or temperament, more adapted to exercise authority or issue command?"<sup>2</sup> In Parliament, he had called for Gillard, who was not married, to "make an honest woman of herself," by following through on political promises.<sup>3</sup> When he was Minister for Health, Abbott had described abortion as "the easy way out."<sup>4</sup>

In the aftermath of Gillard's speech, Abbott's colleagues rushed to steer the conversation away from the conduct that Gillard had described, to focus instead on her use of the word "misogyny" itself. Abbott's deputy, Julie Bishop, accused Gillard of playing the

victim, and asked: "What does that say to the vulnerable women in Australia, what does that say to the women who really are subjected to attacks of misogyny?"<sup>5</sup> Christopher Pyne, a prominent member of Parliament, said, "The prime minister knew when she used the term 'misogyny' that she was calling Tony Abbott a woman-hater, and she should bear the burden of that vicious personal smear."<sup>6</sup> The point of this counterattack seemed to be that the label "misogynist" should be reserved for behavior more extreme—more hateful—than Abbott's.

The word "misogyny," derived from Ancient Greek, translates directly to "hatred (*misein*) of women (*gyne*)." In 2002, the *Oxford English Dictionary* updated its definition from "hatred of women" to "hatred or dislike of, or prejudice against women," citing the need to keep pace with modern usage.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of Gillard's speech, Australia's national dictionary, the *Macquarie*, announced that it too would add the notion of "entrenched prejudice against women" to its definition, a decision that enraged Abbott's supporters.<sup>8</sup> Bronwyn Bishop, a faithful colleague

of Abbott's, objected to changing the definition "simply because Julia Gillard doesn't understand the correct meaning and usage of words."<sup>9</sup> Christopher Pyne was moved to issue a statement saying that the *Macquarie* had been "undermined in its entirety."<sup>10</sup> To them, these developments represented a bad-faith effort to expand the meaning of the word to cover an unjustifiably wide category of behavior.

The tussle over the definition of misogyny calls attention to the political and social implications of the concept's evolving meaning. In her book *Down Girl*, the feminist philosopher Kate Manne objected to "naïve" conceptions of misogyny, in which it is understood as a subjective psychological feeling of hatred or hostility towards women, simply because they are women.<sup>11</sup> Manne argued that such definitions make misogyny a "virtually non-existent and politically marginal phenomenon, as well as an inscrutable one."<sup>12</sup> Instead, she proposed that misogyny should be understood in terms of people's actions and their consequences. In her view, misogyny is a property of social environments in which women "encounter hostility due to the enforcement and policing of patriarchal norms and expectations."<sup>13</sup>

Manne's definition locates misogyny in the set of behaviors that operate to continuously entrench women's subordination to men. Her reconceptualization makes misogyny easier to detect, by alerting us to the everyday, unseen ways in which it enforces gender norms. This is significant, because while there are certainly examples of attitudes that are overtly and explicitly misogynistic (for example, the Australian Senator David Leyonhjelm's recent refusal to apologize after shouting at one of his female colleagues during a Senate debate to "stop shagging men"),<sup>14</sup> it is more often the case that misogynistic beliefs are hidden from view, or disguised. Manne's definition responds to that fact by shifting the conversation away from what might be happening in the recesses

UNDERSTANDING MISOGYNY  
AS SOMETHING WOMEN  
FACE, RATHER THAN AS  
SOMETHING MEN FEEL, SHIFTS  
THE CONVERSATION AWAY  
FROM POINTLESS QUESTIONS  
ABOUT WHAT SOMEONE  
TRULY BELIEVES, AND INSTEAD  
ENCOURAGES CONSIDERATION  
OF THE EFFECTS OF THEIR  
BEHAVIORS.

of alleged misogynists' minds, and focusing instead on what misogyny does to women.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, Manne's definition (and to a lesser degree, the *Macquarie's* revised definition) has the potential to foster a more productive dialogue about the place of women in public life. In particular, it can help us avoid the futile conversations about a person's feelings that tend to follow accusations of misogyny (*how could he be a misogynist when he loves his daughters?, or, was Elliot Rodger's problem that he actually loved women too much?*).<sup>16</sup> Understanding misogyny as something women face, rather than as something men feel, impels movement away from pointless questions about what someone truly believes, and instead encourages consideration of the effects of their behaviors.

The reconceptualization of misogyny should also guide responses to its real-world expressions. Manne's claim is that misogyny can be purely structural—contained in norms, social behaviors, and institutions. That understanding naturally opens the door to responses aimed at systemic reform, rather than isolated condemnation of a few bad apples. In the UK, a national campaign is underway for certain expressions of misogyny, such as groping and catcalling,

to be legally classified as hate crimes or hate incidents.<sup>17</sup> Advocates for the reform have observed that domestic abuse and violence against women do not take place in a vacuum, but are enabled and supported by a culture that normalizes women's subordination throughout public life.<sup>18</sup> Legal reclassification highlights the misogynistic attitudes underlying some behaviors, as a way to acknowledge and begin reforming that culture.

Paying attention to the evolving definition of the word "misogyny" is important, because the way we define and use concepts shapes our understanding of the events they signify. How we perceive the world depends, to some degree, on the language we have to describe it—for instance, native speakers of languages that don't have a specific word for the color "blue" have been shown to be less adept at distinguishing between shades of blue, and at separating blue squares from green ones.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, an overly narrow definition of the word "misogyny" can limit, and in some cases obscure, our understanding of real-world events.

The rhetorical power of language needs to be harnessed to describe the social forces that continue to exclude women from full and equal participation in politics and society. Doing so is a step towards sharpening our understanding of women's place in public life, and subverting the misogynistic practices that currently limit it.

# NOTES

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# RADICAL FEMINISM IN "UNLIKELY" PLACES

## THE WORK OF TARABAI SHINDE

Ira Guha

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**LAST OCTOBER, INDIA'S** deputy foreign minister M. J. Akbar resigned from his post following allegations of sexual harassment.<sup>1</sup> Akbar's case received sensational publicity, both because of his prominent status as a journalist-turned-politician, but also because of the domino effect of accusations leveled against him. Following a single accusation by journalist Priya Ramani, at least 20 women came forward with stories of sexual harassment and molestation they faced at the hands of Akbar.<sup>2</sup> Akbar's resignation came to symbolize the gross mistreatment of women in the workplace, but also the optimism that, as part of the rising #MeToo movement, women were finally speaking out.

Yet at the same time, critics have argued that India's #MeToo movement is limited to elite urban society, and in particular English speakers. Most allegations have taken place in professional working environments, notably media and journalism, far removed from the spaces occupied by lower-class and rural women. The columnist Tavleen Singh has argued that while #MeToo may result in fewer cases of harassment in urban workplaces, it

"will have done nothing to improve the terrible lot of ordinary Indian women."<sup>3</sup> Elite urban women may have the financial security and educational capital to join #MeToo, but the majority of India's women (who are at greater risk of violence and rape) are less empowered to speak out.

While the debate over whether #MeToo is an elitist movement is new, it is evocative of a question that has plagued feminist theorists for decades: Is it only possible for women with a certain level of educational or social privilege to fight for gender equality? In the introduction to her 1972 anthology *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, the American feminist Miriam Schneir argued that "No feminist works emerged from behind the Hindu purdah or out of Moslem harems; centuries of slavery do not provide fertile soil for intellectual development or expression."<sup>4</sup> Schneir's argument here is simple: the more patriarchal and repressive a society, the less likely it is that feminist resistance, particularly in the form of writing, will exist.

The revival and translation of feminist texts from vernacular languages into

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English suggests that such a theory is flawed. Patriarchal society may be at fault for repressing feminist activity, but Western and Indian elites are at fault for failing to engage with feminist writing in languages other than English. A startling example of this is *Stri Purusha Tulana* (or *A Comparison Between Women and Men*), a radical 19th-century feminist text that was translated from Marathi into English in 1992 by the British historian Rosalind O'Hanlon.<sup>5</sup> Originally written in 1882 by Tarabai Shinde, an uneducated, non-elite woman from a small town in Western India, *Stri Purusha Tulana* is an impassioned appeal to men to recognize the double standards by which women of the time were treated, and the injustices that they faced in nearly every aspect of life. Yet despite being the first known text from the Indian subcontinent in which a woman fiercely addresses the question of gender equality, *Stri Purusha Tulana* and its writer remained in obscurity for over a century and continues to be little-known today.

*Stri Purusha Tulana* should be read by 21st-century feminists, both because it shines light on the challenges faced by women living in colonial society, but also because its scathing critiques of patriarchy continue to be relevant today. In her discussion of colonial society, Shinde expressed outrage at the hypocrisy of elite Indian men, who co-opted English practices of dress, food, and lifestyle,

but at the same time rejected Western ideas about educating women that went against Hindu religion. She fiercely (and sarcastically) confronted the men guilty of this hypocrisy:

“You wear the same clothes as them [the English]; you're as learned; you enjoy the things they like to eat to your hearts' content, including meat and alcohol. You go wherever you like in trains and boats. You eat all sorts of forbidden foods. Then you turn around and claim you're great 'defenders of dharma [religion].”<sup>6</sup>

While the critique above is specific to the context of 19th-century colonial society, commentary within *Stri Purusha Tulana* on topics ranging from prostitution to the sexual division of labour remain extraordinarily (and depressingly) pertinent to gender relations in India today. On the subject of prostitution, Tarabai argued that rather than there being such a thing as the “natural” prostitute, the sex trade was borne from complex social processes, including poverty and seduction by men. She wrote:

“What is a whore? Do you think she's some form of life that wasn't made in the same way as the rest of creation? In fact, whores are just some of those women you've seduced and lured away from their homes . . . It's just the way they earn their living, and if they don't do what their customers tell them, next day they go hungry.”<sup>7</sup>

Tarabai's defense of prostitution as a means for impoverished women to earn a living may appear familiar to 21st-century feminists; but in an era where the blending of Victorian and brahmanical values resulted in prostitutes being seen as disreputable and wicked,<sup>8</sup> these views were exceptionally progressive. Equally forward-thinking was Tarabai's recognition of the sexual division of labor, in which women were relegated to the domain of housework while men were able to gain education and

work for money. Below are two of many passages within *Stri Purusha Tulana* where these views are expressed:

“Women in this world are forever putting up with all sorts of hard toil, difficulty, hunger and thirst, harassment and beatings—and all they ask is a kindly word from you. It's true, you go out and earn the money. But she has to see to the running of the house, has to do exactly as you tell her, perpetually obedient, kept in ignorance, toiling at the most exhausting work till her body's pleasure breaks into little pieces.”<sup>9</sup>

“Starting from your childhood you collect all rights in your own hands and womankind you just push in a dark corner far from the real world, shut up in purdah, frightened, sat on, dominated as if she was a female slave . . . Learning isn't for a woman, nor can they come and go as they please. Even if a woman is allowed to go outside, the women she meets are ignorant like her, they're all just the same. So how's she ever going to get any greater understandings or intelligence?”<sup>10</sup>

Nearly 140 years after the passages above were written, female literacy rates in India (65 percent) remain well below male literacy rates (82 percent).<sup>11</sup> Tarabai's description of the sexual division of labor, in which women perform the unpaid labor of domestic work, still characterizes gender relations for millions of people not only in India but across the world. Sadly, her observation in 1882 that domestic labor can go hand in hand with harassment and violence continues to remain a distressing reality.

In the wake of India's #MeToo movement, the popular online magazine *Scroll.in* published a reading list of Indian women who had been “smashing patriarchy for generations.”<sup>12</sup> The list included better-known 19th-century Marathi feminists, such as the social activists Pandita Ramabai and Savitribai Phule, but it

did not mention Tarabai Shinde and her work *Stri Purusha Tulana*. Rather than being intentional, this omission was likely the result of the relatively recent translation of the text into English, and the lack of attention that it has received outside of academic circles.

Yet as I hope this article has demonstrated, *Stri Purusha Tulana* ought to be read and celebrated by feminists, both in South Asia and abroad. Aside from its value as a historical text and its relevance to gender relations today, the existence of *Stri Purusha Tulana* is a testament to the ability of women writers to formulate original and pioneering ideas in the most unlikely circumstances. Contrary to the idea that feminist writing and activism is restricted to elite society, Tarabai Shinde's work provides optimism that feminist acts are possible where gross injustices towards women continue to persist. As the historian Geraldine Forbes argued long before the emergence of #MeToo: “Indian women have not been as silent as some accounts would have us believe.”<sup>13</sup>

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# #PEPPERDEMMINISTRIES

## A DIGITAL AFROCENTRIC APPROACH TO FEMINISM

Amazing Grace Danso and Jackson Miller

**IN EARLY FALL** 2017, the husband of Ghanaian entertainer Afia Schwarzenegger uploaded videos of what appeared to be Schwarzenegger engaging in an extramarital affair. Ghana's digital public swiftly demonized her. That September, several women used the hashtag #MenAreTheirOwnEnemies to expose the misogyny pervading media coverage of the Schwarzenegger affair. Regardless of the facts of the matter—which were disputed by several people involved—the women of #MenAreTheirOwnEnemies shared alternative narratives of the event online to provoke discourse around the question: How would the public react if a man had been caught cheating by his wife, rather than the other way around?<sup>1</sup>

In a matter of weeks, this group of seven women organized themselves as #PepperDemMinistries (PDM) to “put gender on Ghana's agenda” by disrupting prevailing norms that favor patriarchal power in Ghanaian society and educating the public on feminism.<sup>2</sup> In the words of PDM, their *modus operandi* is “flipping the script [on] toxic gender narratives.”<sup>3</sup> As the group celebrates its first year of work, along

with a following of nearly 20,000 on Facebook, PDM members continue to engage government bureaucrats, media personalities, and gender scholars in both physical and digital spaces to advance more conversations about feminism. What merits further analysis, though, is how PDM continues to build its audience by unapologetically claiming a hyperlocal identity. Instead of evangelizing universalistic feminism, PDM leadership draws from the privileges and obstacles that come from their daily experiences as urban professional, millennial, Christian, Ghanaian women to trigger public dialogue on gender equality through social media.<sup>4</sup>

This essay seeks to critically examine the ways in which PDM's digital origins shape the ways the group cultivates, broadcasts, and reckons with its own dynamic feminist ideology in real time alongside a primarily West African, digital audience.

### PRIVILEGING LOCAL IDENTITIES OVER UNIVERSAL INTERESTS

#PepperDemMinistries' brand comes from several Ghanaian markers. The group's logo is the local Adinkra symbol for pepper, a staple

ingredient in Ghanaian cuisine. *Mako*, or pepper, has historically represented inequality and the uneven distribution of resources. “Mako is a shortened form of the Akan proverb, ‘Mako nyinaa mpatu mmere,’ literally ‘All peppers (presumably on the same tree) do not ripen simultaneously.’”<sup>5</sup> The proverb operates as a call to action for those able to help the less fortunate. For PDM, pepper becomes a metaphor for truth, a truth that might be uncomfortable, but leads to greater societal consciousness and can thus cause societal change.<sup>6</sup>

The “Dem” of #PepperDemMinistries originally referred to a pidgin English transliteration of “them,” as in PDM “throws pepper” or raises truth in the face of detractors who seek to preserve patriarchal power structures in Ghanaian society, but PDM leadership has also linked “Dem” to democracy. PDM positions its advocacy work in constant dialogue with its broader communities and intersectional interests, thereby encouraging others to participate in these conversations on gender.

Finally, the “Ministries” label reflects how PDM group members envision their work as a kind of ministry or call to duty. It also pokes fun at the proliferation of mega-churches in Ghana and how pastors leverage their platforms “to portray women as the ‘weaker sex’ emotionally and intellectually, who need protection and guidance . . . re-inscribing male domination and undermining female autonomy.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, PDM does not separate its advocacy from the prevailing cultural context and the localized feminisms this context produces.

The group invokes “motherism” to trigger conversations on unlearning narratives of gender inequity. Motherism venerates the role of mothers and mother-like figures as those of authority. This reflects matrilineal social structures that governed many Ghanaian societies before the onset of European colonization. In

this sense, the reach of matriarchal authority extends beyond a nuclear family household; it extends across the community.<sup>8</sup> The matriarch empowers her community to work for the benefit of one another. Stated another way, the welfare of the individual is inextricably linked to the welfare of the community, and vice versa. Motherism fuses notions of community and individual as two components of a larger identity. Simultaneously, motherism activates another African philosophy, “Ubuntu,” encapsulated by the phrase: “I am because we are; since we are, therefore I am.”<sup>9</sup>

Motherism and Ubuntu do not reject gendered hierarchies in Ghanaian society; rather, they work concomitantly rejecting elements of Western feminism that exclusively define the home as a site of anti-woman subjugation. Western feminist ideologies, particularly those stemming from the mid-20th century, focus on the rejection of traditional societal expectations for women like marriage, motherhood, and homemaking.<sup>10</sup> These roles, after all, may confine women to the domestic sphere, at the expense of realizing their full sense of self and potential.<sup>11</sup> However, this perspective has led to ideological clashes between Western and African scholars. According to Nigerian gender scholar Oyèrónkè Oyèwùmí:

“African feminism argues that western feminism is not adaptable for African women because traditional feminism sees these women as subjugated, uneducated and oppressed individuals. In a simplified way western feminism does not see third world women as ‘free,’ not while judged by their standards.”<sup>12</sup>

As a result, African feminists combat multiple systems of social dominance: patriarchy and imperialism. Imperialism, in the context of this essay, is interpreted as the domination of certain logics of identity and power suitable to colonizing powers over the lived experiences of those formerly colonized. Through

## AS A RESULT, AFRICAN FEMINISTS COMBAT MULTIPLE SYSTEMS OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE: PATRIARCHY AND IMPERIALISM.

empire, European powers reinforced familiar gender hierarchies along racial lines. Per sociologist Dr. Desiree Lewis, “Gender hegemony benefits from race and class hegemony when the gender practices of subordinate race and class groups are defined as problematic or deviant in order to reify and legitimate the ideal quality content for femininity and masculinity . . . [which ultimately] serve dominant class and race interests.”<sup>13</sup>

Where does PDM situate itself in this ongoing debate?

PDM uses motherism and “Ubuntu” philosophies to make explicit how patriarchal power often transforms homemaking and marriage as sites of subjugation without advocating for a complete rejection of these institutions. According to PDM leadership, “Individual women, the collective and the family, is the crux of all gender politics. Economics, society, and culture merely impinge on them. Plus, marriages are not practiced by people in isolation of the culture or society.”<sup>14</sup>

By focusing on the domestic sphere as a site of resistance, PDM complicates the aforementioned divides between Eurocentric and Afrocentric ideologies. Additionally, PDM makes raising feminist consciousness more accessible to the masses by posting content across cyberspaces. And the humorous and witty tones pervading PDM’s posts operate to further expand their accessibility. In the context of digital globalization in the 21st century, cyberspace allows groups like PDM to compress both space and time to forge linkages with transnational feminist mobilizations, all while staying grounded by local feminist ideologies.

## PLAYING WITH SCALE ACROSS CYBERSPACES

From radio to video to written posts on Facebook and Twitter, PDM’s agile use of multimedia across cyberspaces makes their work more tangible to their audience. By rendering gender inequities more visible to an increasingly digital Ghanaian public, “social media’s openness and accessibility help show the links between the personal and the collective, and the local and the global that are not easily discernible otherwise.”<sup>15</sup>

These conversations, advocacy, events—all of the “pepper”—take place in full view of PDM’s audience. In this manner, PDM puts into operation a kind of horizontally integrated feminism that is less interested in promoting a single cause than promoting a kind of mindset shift.<sup>16</sup> Gender should be reframed as a lens through which society should engage and interrogate their lived experiences. In this manner, feminism quite literally meets stakeholders where they are, and prompts a timely application of feminist ideology into the minutia of everyday life. Ultimately, this reframing of gender as a social lens rather than issue area fosters a kind of democratic feedback loop between PDM leadership and its audience.

As a result, PDM’s social media advocacy does not merely “show the links between the personal and the collective,” it also bridges the digital and the tangible by fostering dialogue on and offline.<sup>17</sup> PDM collaborated with international organizations like the African Women’s Development Fund to put on the panel event: “Time is Now: Intergenerational Conversations on the Evolution of the Feminist Movement in Ghana,” which commemorated International Women’s Day 2018 by bringing together both established and emerging voices in Ghanaian feminism.<sup>18</sup>

While Ghana has arguably been an incubator for pioneers charting new Africa-focused, feminist spaces, many of these pioneers

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are academics who have spent their careers building credentials across both Ghanaian and Western universities.<sup>19</sup> Nearly a third of the panelists who partook in the “Time is Now” intergenerational discussions were academics.<sup>20</sup> Per Mme. Titilope Ajayi, a University of Ghana, Legon PhD candidate in international affairs:

“It is noteworthy that a group that emerged with no visible connections to Ghana’s feminist history engaged at least two other generations in frank conversation that laid bare the many facets of Ghanaian womanhood as well as the symmetries, disjunctures, gaps and opportunities for pan-generational feminist organizing in Ghana.”<sup>21</sup>

PDM intentionally creates this space for younger voices to showcase their work devising feminist ideology through digital engagement. And across these cyberspaces, PDM can also shine light on global connections. The “Time is Now” title arguably situates this event in a larger body of work spanning the Atlantic to include the US-based “Time’s Up” movement.

PDM also leverages its cyberpresence to build feminist collectives across the African continent, all while honoring local feminist paradigms like motherism and Ubuntu. In late 2018, PDM members posted about the Rwanda-based “Bandeberoho” program. Translated from the Kinyarwanda phrase for “role model,” this program offers classes to men on domestic roles, “everything from

cooking and cleaning to discussions on how to challenge traditional gender roles,” in efforts to curb instances of domestic violence.<sup>22</sup> Per program records, participating communities have witnessed sharp declines in domestic violence incidents, as well as spikes in women-led entrepreneurship. PDM makes clear how principles from motherism can demonstrate to its digital audience how work in the domestic sphere is central to the stability of both the family unit and the broader community. By demonstrating the importance of this work to father-figures in the household, women may more actively negotiate how they distribute labor between family members, which, as seen in the data, may include entrepreneurship. In these cases, women are not necessarily abandoning their role as homemakers for, say, full-time employment; rather, they are restructuring their roles within and outside of the home in order to realize their full potential as they see fit. As a result, Rwandan women who were previously victims of domestic violence become empowered to define their own agency and feminism.<sup>23</sup>

PDM has built among the largest feminist mobilizations in Ghana today, and group leaders have done so by owning their unique identities at the intersection of nationhood, class, race, culture, and gender. PDM does not strive to achieve some universalistic feminist standing in the way they conduct their practice; rather, they deconstruct feminism as a constantly shifting process between group leadership, audience, and policy-making bodies. Even when its message circulates worldwide across cyberspace, PDM’s work remains grounded in distinctly local paradigms of feminism and social location, particularly “motherism” and “ubuntu.” It has built a kind of digital, democratic practice of feminism, its work always in dialogue instantaneously with its growing audience.

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# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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We are currently accepting pitches (100-200 words) for our online publication and Spring 2020 print journal volume. All voices and genders are welcome to contribute.

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